

# Salafi Jihadist Violence in Egypt's North Sinai:

## From Local Insurgency to Islamic State Province

Militancy in Egypt's North Sinai governorate—a serious problem since that country's January 2011 uprising—was compounded in November 2014 when Ansar Bayt al Maqdis (“Supporters of Jerusalem”, ABM), the main salafi jihadist organisation in Sinai, swore allegiance to the group that calls itself the Islamic State (IS). This Research Paper closely inspects ABM/Wilayat Sinai and ways in which the group changed over three phases of its existence: from the 2011 uprising to Morsi's 2013 ouster, from that point until the group's pledge to IS in 2014, and since the emergence of Islamic State affiliate Wilayat Sinai. This in-depth documentation is meant to serve as a case study of the impact that affiliating with IS has on local salafi jihadist groups.

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# 1. Introduction

Militancy in Egypt's North Sinai governorate—a serious problem since that country's January 2011 uprising—was compounded in November 2014 when Ansar Bayt al Maqdis (“Supporters of Jerusalem”, ABM), the main salafi jihadist organisation in Sinai, swore allegiance to the group that calls itself the Islamic State (IS).

Over the course of 2011 and 2012, ABM consolidated itself in North Sinai with attacks against Israel and Egyptian-Israeli interests. In July 2013, ABM shifted toward Egyptian targets following the ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi and a crackdown on his followers. Then defence minister, now president, Abdel Fattah al Sisi declared a “war on terror” and reengaged ABM in North Sinai. Over 2013-2014 the group increased its proficiency, but it also suffered losses. ABM turned to IS likely in an attempt to stabilise its fortunes, changing its name to Wilayat Sinai—the “Sinai province” of IS’ so-called Caliphate.

Since its emergence, Wilayat Sinai has been a threat to the local population, especially in comparison to ABM. In addition, the group has been more interested in controlling—and in putting forward the appearance of controlling—territory and also has incorporated a larger number of Egyptian salafi jihadists, who do not have ties to the peninsula but come with stronger support for IS ideology. Finally, Wilayat Sinai has made clear that it is willing and capable to serve as an arm of IS’ agenda in Sinai and Egypt—capped with the downing of a Russian passenger jet in October 2015.

This Research Paper closely inspects ABM/Wilayat Sinai and ways in which the group changed over three phases of its existence: from the 2011 uprising to Morsi’s 2013 ouster, from that point until the group’s pledge to IS in 2014, and since the emergence of Wilayat Sinai. Sections 2-4 wade into the tactics and targets of both ABM and its successor Wilayat Sinai during these three different phases of militancy in Sinai. Such in-depth documentation is meant to serve as a case study of the impact on local salafi jihadist groups of affiliating with IS.

After summarizing the developments in Wilayat Sinai’s operations, section 5 notes the opportunities these changes provide for the Egyptian government to better counter the group in the peninsula and across the country. Section 6 briefly analyses past policies that have been unable to stem the threat Wilayat Sinai poses to the local population, the Egyptian state, and international interests; and then notes recent developments in Egyptian government policy and military operations that could reverse the situation in Sinai. The final section, section 7, offers policy recommendations for the Egyptian government and its international partners in countering the Sinai militant threat.

This Research Paper is a follow up to the author’s March 2014 *ICCT Research Paper*, “Security in the Sinai: Present and Future”, which outlined Sinai’s political and security developments to date. That previous paper should be consulted for detailed background on Sinai’s political actors and their interests, the rise of militancy in the peninsula, and Egyptian policies to confront the deteriorating security situation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Gold, “Security in the Sinai: Present and Future”, *ICCT Research Paper*, March 2014, <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Gold-Security-In-The-Sinai-March-2014.pdf>.

## 2. February 2011-July 2013

ABM developed as a consortium of numerous salafi jihadist factions—a “brand name” for jihadist militancy in the northeast corner of Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. Over the course of 2011 and 2012, other jihadist groups announced their alleged presence in North Sinai, only to disappear shortly after.

ABM’s consolidation as the main—if not the only—salafi jihadist brand makes it difficult to pinpoint the group’s first attack. Likely it was the 5 February 2011 explosion of the Egypt-Israel gas pipeline, as the group broadly claimed credit in July 2012 for thirteen such attacks to date.<sup>2</sup> The pipeline bombings, starting while Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak clung to power, marked the first phase of ABM’s operations.

Initially, ABM’s operations targeted Israel and symbols of the Egyptian-Israeli relationship. This should be clear from the group’s chosen name: it set its sights on Jerusalem, not Cairo. During this unsettled period a number of factions made threats and claimed attacks, and a number of attacks went unclaimed, but ABM only claimed two types of attacks: those on Egypt’s gas pipeline; and cross-border raids, shootings, and rocket launches into Israel.

### 2.1 Pipeline Attacks

The network of pipelines that run through North Sinai connect Egyptian natural gas resources to the cities of Sinai, to a military-run industrial zone, and further afield to Jordan. However, the line that most angered the local population—and Egyptians generally—was the one that sent Egyptian gas to Israel.

As agreed in 2005, Egyptian gas began flowing to Israel in 2008 via the East Mediterranean Gas Company (EMG), a consortium of former Egyptian and Israeli intelligence officers with close ties to the Mubarak government. The Egyptian people looked at the characters involved, compared the rates EMG paid to other international energy transactions, and could not help but see signs of corruption.<sup>3</sup>

In actual fact, Egypt’s rising energy demands and lack of investment meant Cairo struggled to deliver to Israel agreed amounts of gas from the beginning. However, the perception of sending gas to Israel was considered an affront by Sinai’s Bedouin population, which witnessed these pipelines running through tribal lands without benefit.

ABM saw this economic cooperation between Israel and Egypt and recognised an opportunity to damage bilateral ties while strengthening its jihadist and tribal *bona fides*. Indeed, ABM’s efforts were successful. By the time ABM claimed responsibility for

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<sup>2</sup> “Ansar Jerusalem Releases Video of Bombing Arish-Ashkelon Pipeline”, SITE Intelligence Group, 24 July 2012,

[http://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10421](http://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10421).

<sup>3</sup> R. Ahren and *Associated Press*, “Egypt and Israel say cancellation of gas supply deal is ‘commercial’, not ‘political’”, *The Times of Israel*, 23 April 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/egypt-reportedly-cancels-gas-supply-deal-with-israel/>.

most of the pipeline attacks, Egypt's government in April 2012 cancelled its twenty-year supply deal.<sup>4</sup>

As announced in his March 2014 obituary, the tactic of targeting the pipelines was masterminded by Tawfiq Mohamed Freij, ABM's founding leader.<sup>5</sup> Freij was an Egyptian jihadist and follower of Khaled Musa'id, who founded the salafi jihadist group responsible for targeting tourist resorts in South Sinai in the 2000s. After Musa'id's death, Freij picked up his mantle. Freij likely received training in Gaza, which solidified his focus on attacking Israel.

## 2.2 Cross-border Attacks

Already on their way to degrading Egyptian-Israeli economic ties, salafi jihadists nearly destroyed bilateral diplomatic relations with a complex cross-border attack on 18 August 2011. Freij led a group of fighters across the Israeli border, in an operation that spread out over seven hours.<sup>6</sup> Three years later, in a video documenting the attack, ABM claimed eleven fighters working in at least three teams took part in the operation, which included light-arms, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), mortars, and suicide vests.<sup>7</sup> There may have been even more assailants, as Israel and Egypt claimed ten were killed (including one that blew himself up), and at least two of the militants allegedly involved survived, including Freij.<sup>8</sup>

Not only was this attack operationally complex, the salafi jihadists also deployed advanced weaponry. ABM claimed it attempted to down a responding Israeli helicopter with an anti-aircraft missile, though most Israeli reports said the actual weapon was an RPG.<sup>9</sup> However, one of the militant teams fired at least two anti-tank missiles at civilian cars—with one causing six of the eight deaths on the Israeli side.<sup>10</sup>

At least some of the militants wore brown uniforms, resembling those of the Egyptian border guards; and as they fled back to Sinai they purposefully did so near Egyptian deployments. Giving chase, Israeli troops accidentally killed at least five real members of the Egyptian border guards and police.<sup>11</sup> The Israeli defence minister apologised for the incident days later, but the violation of sovereignty and killing of Egyptians set off the political class and the wider public, testing the limits of post-Mubarak relations with

<sup>4</sup> A. Fisher-Ilan, "Israel says Egypt gas cutoff a business dispute", *Reuters*, 23 April 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/23/us-israel-egypt-gas-iduSBre83M08V20120423>.

<sup>5</sup> D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem confirms deaths of 2 members, including founder", *The Long War Journal*, 16 March 2014, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/03/sinai-based\\_ansar\\_je.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/03/sinai-based_ansar_je.php).

<sup>6</sup> "Timeline / Eight hours of terror in southern Israel", *Haaretz*, 18 August 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/timelineeight-hours-of-terror-in-southern-israel-1.379344>.

<sup>7</sup> Ansar Bayt al Maqdis, "The Epic Battles of the Criterion: Documenting the Details Of the Raid of Greater Eilat", *Jihadology*, 16 July 2014, <http://jihadology.net/2014/07/16/new-video-message-from-jamaat-an%E1%B9%A3ar-bayt-al-maqdis-the-epic-battles-of-the-criterion-documenting-the-details-of-the-raid-of-greater-eilat/>.

<sup>8</sup> A. Issacharoff, "Report: Three Egyptians Took Part in Terrorist Attacks on Southern Israel", *Haaretz*, 24 August 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/report-three-egyptians-took-part-in-terrorist-attacks-on-southern-israel-1.380321>.

<sup>9</sup> Y. Lappin, "Counter-terror officer killed by terrorist fire near Eilat", *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 August 2011, <http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Counter-terror-officer-killed-by-terrorist-fire-near-Eilat>.

<sup>10</sup> "Timeline / Eight hours of terror in southern Israel" (2011).

<sup>11</sup> B. Ravid and *Reuters*, "Israel, Egypt to open joint probe into events surrounding Eilat terror attacks", *Haaretz*, 25 August 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-egypt-to-open-joint-probe-into-events-surrounding-eilat-terror-attacks-1.380672>.

Israel.<sup>12</sup> ABM could not have planned for a better outcome: less than a month later, protesters sacked the Israeli embassy in Cairo, shuttering that location permanently.

While the August 2011 attack was by far the biggest cross-border attack, it was only the first. On 22 June 2012, three militants attacked two armoured vehicles of Israeli labourers working to quickly complete Israel's border fence along the Sinai Peninsula, killing one.<sup>13</sup> Then on 21 September 2012, three Egyptians sent by ABM engaged with an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) unit deployed near the border. All three militants were killed, as was one IDF soldier. In a video released months later, ABM claimed its initial plan was to trick Israeli leaders into thinking an IDF soldier had been captured, thus instigating another Israeli response in Egyptian territory.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to cross-border raids and small-arms fire, ABM fired a number of rockets over the border at Israel, primarily at the Red Sea resort city of Eilat. The first rocket attack on Eilat occurred in April 2012. By the end of June 2013, ten rockets had been fired across the Egyptian-Israeli border; including three during the November 2012 Israel-Gaza conflict.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3 Other Targets

During ABM's consolidation phase, a number of attacks and threats took place across North Sinai for which the group never took responsibility, such as the looting of Rafah's Holy Family Church and leaflets threatening that city's Christians.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, assassinations of tribal leaders also took place during this period. Although these murders were unclaimed, the targets were known for opposing the growing strength of Sinai's salafi jihadists.<sup>17</sup>

Other alleged salafi jihadist groups, which may later have become part of ABM, made threats or carried out attacks. This category includes Jund al Sharia, which declared itself in August 2012 and threatened "US peacekeeping forces in the Sinai", a reference to the international Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), which monitors compliance of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, ABM factions were responsible for attacks—and even publicised them—without using the group's name in a way that may taint the brand. For example, an ABM

<sup>12</sup> Y. Katz, "Barak apologizes to Egypt over security officers' deaths", *The Jerusalem Post*, 20 August 2011, <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Barak-apologizes-to-Egypt-over-security-officers-deaths>.

<sup>13</sup> J. Greenberg, "Gunmen from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula attack Israeli workers, killing one", *The Washington Post*, 18 June 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/gunmen-in-egypts-sinai-peninsula-fire-at-israel-border-killing-atleast-2/2012/06/18/gJOANbBkkV\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/gunmen-in-egypts-sinai-peninsula-fire-at-israel-border-killing-atleast-2/2012/06/18/gJOANbBkkV_story.html).

<sup>14</sup> D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem: 'The light of victory has begun to shine'", *The Long War Journal*, 15 January 2013, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/01/ansar\\_jerusalem\\_the.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/01/ansar_jerusalem_the.php).

<sup>15</sup> "2012 Annual Summary - Terrorism and CT Activity Data and Trends", Israel Security Agency, p. 11, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/terrorInfo/2012AnnualSummary-en.pdf>; "2013 Annual Summary", Israel Security Agency, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/English/EnTerrorData/Reports/Pages/2013AnnualSummary.aspx>; and "Monthly Summary – November 2012", Israel Security Agency, p. 4, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/TerrorInfo/reports/nov12report-en.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> "Christians flee Rafah after militant threats", *Associated Press*, 28 September 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/54123.aspx>.

<sup>17</sup> Y. Saleh, "Gunmen kill Egyptian tribal leader and son in Sinai", *Reuters*, 12 August 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-sinai-violence-idUSBRE87C02C20120813>.

<sup>18</sup> B. Roggio, "New jihadist group emerges in the Egyptian Sinai", *The Long War Journal*, 1 August 2012, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/new\\_jihadist\\_group\\_emerges\\_in.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/new_jihadist_group_emerges_in.php).

leader Shadi al Menai led a group of armed men to abduct 25 Chinese cement factory employees in January 2012. In an on-camera ransom message, al Menai called for the end of gas exports to Israel; but he also made a more standard Bedouin political demand regarding releasing men arrested in Egypt's security sweeps following South Sinai terrorist attacks from 2004 to 2006.<sup>19</sup>

Al Menai, too, led a March 2012 siege of the MFO's North Camp base.<sup>20</sup> North Camp actually suffered an armed incursion in September 2012, when 60-70 armed Bedouin broke through the base's fencing. Troops from the Colombian MFO contingent forced the militants' retreat, but not before they torched a guard tower and a vehicle, and lightly injured a number of Colombian soldiers.<sup>21</sup> Again, ABM did not claim responsibility, nor did any other group, despite the alleged Jund al Sharia's earlier threat.

The MFO itself downplayed these attacks as a continuation of Bedouin political actions: using the MFO to win political demands from the Egyptian government. In its 2012 annual report, the organisation referred to al Menai's March blockade as a peaceful, if disruptive, demonstration. It called the armed group that invaded North Camp "protestors".<sup>22</sup> However, MFO sources say the force recognised that the makeup of the individuals demonstrating outside North Camp had changed, as did the quality of the weapons they carried.

Finally, attacks on Egyptian security forces began during this time as well—although they would increase exponentially in the summer of 2013. Sinai expert Mohannad Sabry wrote that the 19 July 2012 slaying of two conscripted soldiers in Sheikh Zuweid was "the first ... premeditated attack on military personnel".<sup>23</sup> In his book on the subject, Sabry linked the perpetrators of that attack to ABM, which announced its formation a week later. ABM, though, never claimed that attack; and its founding video statement focused on the group's targeting of the pipelines.

The deadliest attack on Egyptian forces prior to 2013 quickly became known as the "Rafah massacre". On 5 August 2012, sixteen Egyptian border guards were slaughtered as they sat down to break their Ramadan fast. This was the first phase of another planned complex operation against Israel, which failed when Israeli forces cornered and destroyed a hijacked Egyptian military vehicle that had broken through the international boundary. Curiously, despite claiming responsibility for all other border infiltrations and being suspected again, ABM was silent on this attack and years later the attack remains unclaimed.

The only incidents of ABM claiming responsibility for attacks on Egyptian civilians, or even security forces, during this time period were actions against alleged spies. In August 2012, ABM beheaded a Sinai Bedouin it accused of organizing a spy ring for Israel's Mossad intelligence organisation. ABM claimed Mossad was behind the

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<sup>19</sup> M. Sabry, *Sinai: Egypt's Linchpin, Gaza's Lifeline, Israel's Nightmare* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2015), pp. 148-9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>21</sup> B. Roggio, "Jihadists attack international peacekeeper base in Egypt's Sinai", *The Long War Journal*, 15 September 2012, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/09/jihadists\\_attack\\_int.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/09/jihadists_attack_int.php).

<sup>22</sup> "Director General's Report to the 2012 Trilateral Meeting", Multinational Force and Observers, 15 November 2012, pp. 1-2, [http://myos.mfo.org/media/mfo/documents/annual\\_report\\_2012.pdf](http://myos.mfo.org/media/mfo/documents/annual_report_2012.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Sabry, *Sinai* (2015), p. 157.



assassination of one of its members, who had been involved in the August 2011 cross-border raid.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. July 2013-November 2014

On 3 July 2013, following mass demonstrations against the elected but divisive Morsi, Egypt's military ousted the president and the nation's security forces began a campaign rounding up his Muslim Brotherhood supporters. These events also began an unprecedented period of attacks by Islamist backers of the ousted president and by salafi jihadists, who may have not supported the Brotherhood but who saw in its rise the opportunity to make Egypt more Islamic and perhaps to operate with more freedom. Also that summer, the Egyptian military renewed counter-terrorism operations in North Sinai, which put more security forces—and therefore more targets—in the volatile governorate.

#### 3.1 Attacks on Security Forces

In the first three months of this period, 110 persons were killed by terrorist violence in North Sinai (38 in July, 42 in August, and 30 in September), almost all of whom were soldiers or police.<sup>25</sup>

Though the pace of attacks in North Sinai rose drastically, during this phase ABM still rarely claimed any of the near-daily attacks on security forces. This silence was true for the worst single incident of 2013, which became known as the “Second Rafah Massacre”, in which an ABM associate and his followers used RPGs to stop a bus of Central Security Forces recruits; the militants then lined the policemen up and shot them, execution-style, killing 25.<sup>26</sup>

In September 2013 ABM released a statement broadly saying it was involved in attacks on security forces, allegedly in response to Egypt's military offensive, but did not identify specific incidents.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it seems as if the group limited its claims to the more spectacular operations. The first documented ABM attack in North Sinai that did not target Israel or the gas pipeline network was not until 18 November 2013. In that incident, the group attacked a military bus with a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) outside the North Sinai capital of al Arish, killing eleven and injuring almost three dozen.<sup>28</sup>

However, by this phase ABM had distinguished itself as basically the only group behind militancy in Sinai. Though the vast majority of attacks in North Sinai went unclaimed, only one other group did claim a sole attack. On 11 September 2011 Jund al Islam carried out a double suicide car bomb attack against a military intelligence building and

<sup>24</sup> B. Roggio, “Ansar Jerusalem claims attack on Israeli troops in the Sinai”, *The Long War Journal*, 23 September 2012, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/09/ansar\\_jerusalem\\_clai.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/09/ansar_jerusalem_clai.php).

<sup>25</sup> Numbers compiled by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, provided to the author.

<sup>26</sup> “Seven sentenced to death for 2013 Rafah massacre”, *Mada Masr*, 6 December 2014, <http://www.madamasr.com/news/seven-sentenced-death-2013-rafah-massacre>.

<sup>27</sup> D. Barnett, “Ansar Jerusalem claims credit for Sinai attacks, challenges army claims”, *The Long War Journal*, 11 September 2013, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/09/ansar\\_jerusalem\\_claims\\_credit.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/09/ansar_jerusalem_claims_credit.php).

<sup>28</sup> “Chapter 2. Country Reports: Middle East and North Africa Overview”, in “Country Reports on Terrorism 2013”, US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224823.htm>.



checkpoint in Rafah, killing six and wounding a number of soldiers and civilians.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, a Gaza-based salafi jihadist group also took responsibility for firing a rocket at Eilat in August 2013, in an incident that was linked to ABM (discussed below in section 3.6).

As a comprehensive report from the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy notes, ABM had clearly shifted focus to targeting Egyptian security forces by September 2013.<sup>30</sup> However, beginning that month most of the group's claimed attacks occurred outside its North Sinai base.

### 3.2 ABM Operations Outside North Sinai

On 5 September 2013, ABM struck a blow to the Egyptian government with a suicide VBIED attack on the convoy of the minister of interior near his Cairo home. The bomber missed his target, but the attack displayed the group's technical and reconnaissance capabilities as well as its desire and ability to operate outside North Sinai. More worrisome, ABM later revealed the bomber to be a former military officer, raising concerns that well-trained and knowledgeable former—and even current—soldiers may be aiding the Sinai-based group.<sup>31</sup>

Worry about ABM infiltration of the security forces grew with the November assassination of Homeland Security officer Mohamed Mabrouk and the January 2014 killing of Mohamed Saeed, head of the interior ministry's technical office.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, according to records of Egypt's Supreme State Security Prosecution, uncovered by Mokhtar Awad and Samuel Tadros, investigators believe ABM's mainland operations were "facilitated by the recruitment of at least two radicalised police officers": Lieutenant Mohamed Eweis and Colonel Sameh al Azizi.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.3 Growing Sophistication: Inside and Outside the Peninsula

In addition to these assassinations, ABM carried out massive VBIED strikes on security buildings in South Sinai (7 October 2013), Ismailiya (19 October 2013), Dakahliya (24 December 2013), and Cairo (24 January 2014) governorates. The largest of these—the December attack on the Security Directorate in Dakahliya's capital of Mansoura—killed over fifteen and injured some 130 people, shaking and destroying nearby buildings in the middle of the night.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> D. Barnett, "Suicide car bombs strike Egyptian security forces in Sinai", *The Long War Journal*, 11 September 2013, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/09/suicide\\_car\\_bombs\\_st.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/09/suicide_car_bombs_st.php).

<sup>30</sup> "Egypt's Rising Security Threat", The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, November 2015, p. 7, [http://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Tahrir\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_WEB.pdf](http://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Tahrir_Report_FINAL_WEB.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem releases video of assassination attempt on Egypt's interior minister", *The Long War Journal*, 26 October 2013, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/10/ansar\\_jerusalem\\_rele.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/10/ansar_jerusalem_rele.php).

<sup>32</sup> D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem claims responsibility for attack on Egyptian security official in Cairo", *The Long War Journal*, 20 November 2013,

[http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/11/ansar\\_jerusalem\\_clai\\_3.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/11/ansar_jerusalem_clai_3.php); and D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem claims Cairo assassination and Sinai pipeline attack", *The Long War Journal*, 28 December 2013, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/01/ansar\\_jerusalem\\_clai\\_7.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/01/ansar_jerusalem_clai_7.php).

<sup>33</sup> M. Awad and S. Tadros, "Bay'a Remorse? Wilayat Sinai and the Nile Valley", *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 8 (2015), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/baya-remorse-wilayat-sinai-and-the-nile-valley>.

<sup>34</sup> K. Fahim and M. El Sheikh, "Egyptian Officials Point at Islamist Group After Blast at Police Building", *The New York Times*, 24 December 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/25/world/middleeast/egypt-car-bomb.html>.

Meanwhile, back in North Sinai, ABM used a man-portable air defence system (MANPADS) to down an Egyptian military helicopter on 25 January 2014.<sup>35</sup> The attack on a Mi-17 transport helicopter, killing all five on board, renewed concerns about smuggled advanced Libyan weaponry into Sinai and raised flags that Sinai-based militants could use these missiles to threaten civil aviation.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to its use of large VBIEDs and advanced weaponry, ABM's military-prowess advanced greatly during this stage as well, and by late summer 2014 militants operating under the group's banner conducted massive operations against the Egyptian military at opposite ends of the country.

On 19 July 2014, twenty salafi jihadist assailants approached a border guard checkpoint near the Farafra Oasis on a main smuggling route by the Libyan border, according to the Egyptian armed forces official account.<sup>37</sup> The attackers, carrying "drums of high explosives" and "sophisticated weapons", peppered the checkpoint with RPGs. One projectile hit a gas cylinder, which set fire to an ammunition dump, setting off a massive explosion. Twenty-two border guards were killed in the deadliest attack since the August 2013 "Second Rafah Massacre"<sup>38</sup> Though ABM never formally claimed responsibility, the group began using footage of the Farafra checkpoint explosion in a video threat against Egypt's soldiers a month later.<sup>39</sup>

ABM's final attack during this phase of operations occurred on 24 October 2014, south of North Sinai's Sheikh Zuweid in the area known as Karam al Qawadis. It was the deadliest attack in Egypt since the 2011 uprising, killing 30 and injuring 30 others.<sup>40</sup> The attack began when a suicide bomber set off a massive VBIED by two armoured vehicles, perhaps with their ammunition compounding the size of the blast. The attack was more than just a large car bomb, however. In claiming the attack weeks later, video footage showed masked gunmen running through the wreckage and firing at injured soldiers: cameras mounted on their gun barrels to capture the horror.<sup>41</sup> The salafi jihadist group also displayed a collection of weaponry it claimed was seized from the checkpoint.

With the increased sophistication and geographical spread of its attacks, ABM also suffered a number of setbacks. Following the arrest and killing of ABM's mainland

<sup>35</sup> D. Kirkpatrick, "Militants Down Egyptian Helicopter, Killing 5 Soldiers", *The New York Times*, 26 January 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/27/world/middleeast/militants-down-egyptian-helicopter-killing-5-soldiers.html>.

<sup>36</sup> J. Binnie, "Grail quest: MANPADS proliferation in the wake of Libya", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 12 June, 2014 <http://www.janes360.com/images/assets/413/39413/Grail.pdf> and "Notice Regarding EGYPT Sinai Peninsula", Federal Aviation Administration, 5 November 2014, [https://www.faa.gov/air\\_traffic/publications/us\\_restrictions/media/Notice\\_Regarding\\_Egypt\\_Sinai\\_Peninsula.pdf](https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/us_restrictions/media/Notice_Regarding_Egypt_Sinai_Peninsula.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, "Within the framework of communicating with the great Egyptian people and to ensure informing them of the full facts about the terrorist incident which targeted a border guard checkpoint in the New Valley on 19/07/2014", Facebook, 22 July 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/511574015640252>.

<sup>38</sup> Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, "The Armed Forces mourn its martyred sons the border guards of Farafra", Facebook, 22 July 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/510374402426880>.

<sup>39</sup> "Ansar Beit al-Maqdes releases video threatening military, police Tuesday", *Mada Masr*, 19 August 2014, <http://www.madamasr.com/news/ansar-beit-al-maqdes-releases-video-threatening-military-police>.

<sup>40</sup> Y. Mohamed, "Attacks in Egypt's Sinai kill 33 security personnel", *Reuters*, 24 October 2014, <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKCN0ID1BZ20141024?sp=true>.

<sup>41</sup> J. Gulhane, "Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis claim deadly Sinai attack", *Daily News Egypt*, 15 November 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/2014/11/15/ansar-beit-al-maqdis-claim-deadly-sinai-attack/>.

leaders and the successful security raid against a major cell in the Arab Sharkas area of Qalyubiya governorate—outside Cairo—in March 2014, ABM attacks broadly halted outside the peninsula in the spring of 2014. By mid-2014, the Farafra attack and associated smaller ones near Egypt’s western border were exceptions, and the group concentrated on its Sinai operations. There, too, the group was under pressure. In March 2014 Freij was killed in North Sinai, by a prematurely detonated IED.<sup>42</sup> Two months later, Egypt’s interior ministry announced the death of al Menai.<sup>43</sup> According to multiple sources, the claim was premature and al Menai is still alive; but whatever operation took place appeared to have put one of ABM’s leading commanders out of commission for some time.

### 3.4 Economic Warfare

Concurrent to these pressures on the organisation, ABM’s targeting expanded during this post-Morsi phase of its existence. In addition to now claiming attacks on security forces with regularity, ABM also began the execution of a proclaimed “economic war” on the Egyptian state.

Morsi’s summer 2012 election as president coincided with a drop off in pipeline bombings. After all, Sinai’s militants succeeded in their goal of cutting off the flow of gas to Israel by April 2012. For more than a year after that, the gas pipeline network sat unmolested. On 7 July 2013, days after Morsi’s ouster, regular targeting of the gas lines started anew—with a new purpose.<sup>44</sup> In its statements of responsibility, ABM claimed to be targeting segments of the network that fed power to military-run industrial complexes in North Sinai.<sup>45</sup> “[W]e warn the army and who [sic] collaborates with it that we are going to keep on targeting their economic interests”, a January 2014 statement declared.<sup>46</sup> In it, ABM specifically noted it had already succeeded in cutting off gas to Israel and would do the same to the military.

ABM’s economic warfare also played out in a new and escalatory direction. Although the group broadly attempted to avoid civilian casualties—even setting off its largest VBIEDs during odd hours—ABM attacked foreigners for the first time. On 16 February 2014 a suicide bomber boarded a bus of South Korean tourists waiting in Taba, South Sinai, to cross into Israel.<sup>47</sup> The assailant killed three Koreans and their bus driver.

In its claim of responsibility, ABM did not justify its attack as targeting tourists in particular, or Christians, or foreigners, or pilgrims heading toward Israel. It specifically couched the operation as part of its “economic war”, not even hinting that attacking

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<sup>42</sup> Barnett, “Ansar Jerusalem confirms deaths of 2 members, including founder” (2014).

<sup>43</sup> “Egypt: Sinai Islamist leader Shadi al-Menei shot dead”, *BBC News*, 23 May 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27533169>.

<sup>44</sup> A. Sweilam, “Egypt: Militants bomb gas pipeline in Sinai”, *Associated Press*, 7 July 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/egypt-militants-bomb-gas-pipeline-sinai>.

<sup>45</sup> Barnett, “Ansar Jerusalem claims Cairo assassination and Sinai pipeline attack” (2013).

<sup>46</sup> Ansar Bayt al Maqdis, “Statement of taking responsibility for targeting the gas pipeline which leads to the armed forces cement factory in central Sinai”, *Jihadology*, 19 January 2014, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22announcement-of-our-responsibility-for-targeting-the-gas-line-leading-to-a-cement-factory-of-the-armed-forces-in-central-sinai22-en.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Z. Gold, “The Sinai War Escalates”, *Foreign Policy*, 19 February 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/19/the-sinai-war-escalates/>.

tourists was an escalatory move.<sup>48</sup> Another attack on South Sinai's tourism sector may have been avoided by dumb luck months later. On 2 May, a suicide bomber blew himself up as he stood in front of a passing bus on the road to the resort town of Sharm al Sheikh.<sup>49</sup> The militant killed only himself, but his intentions were likely much worse. On the way to an intended target, the assailant's car got stuck in the Sinai sands. Egypt's security services found a number of grenades and RPGs in his abandoned vehicle, suggesting a much bigger plot.<sup>50</sup>

In August 2014 American William Henderson, an Apache Corporation employee, was killed in Egypt's Western Desert, where the company maintains oil interests.<sup>51</sup> At the time, it was reported that Henderson was killed in a hijacking in a border area known for criminal smuggling. However, his murder occurred during a month of increased militant activity in western Egypt, linked to ABM associates currently operating from Libya. On 1 December 2014, the Sinai-based group claimed responsibility for Henderson's murder, circulating photos of his passport and employee identification cards. The circumstances remain sketchy: it is possible ABM was not actually behind Henderson's death, but instead obtained his documents from a criminal gang. However, by its own record, Henderson was the first westerner killed by ABM.

### 3.5 Targeting Egyptian Civilians

The increase in attacks on security targets often put civilians in harm's way, despite ABM's alleged efforts to minimise civilian casualties. In one tragic example, a mortar fired in al Arish strayed and hit a market instead of its intended target: a military post. Seven civilians were killed and 25 injured.<sup>52</sup>

As in its first phase, direct targeting of Egyptian civilians continued to be rare from 2013-2014. Especially after Morsi's ouster and the government's crackdown on his supporters, and increased military operations in North Sinai, the group's propaganda framed itself as a protector of Egypt's—and especially Sinai's—Muslims against the perceived abuses of the state.

However, ABM continued to take action against tribal leaders and other civilians that threatened its position in North Sinai. In the most gruesome episode of this period, on 28 August 2014, ABM published a video of the beheading of four men it accused of being spies for Israel.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, within a month ABM had claimed eight such murders, which came at a time of international focus on the beheading videos distributed by IS.<sup>54</sup> However, as ABM had beheaded an alleged Israeli spy as early as two years prior, it is

<sup>48</sup> D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem claims tourist bus bombing in Egypt's Sinai", *The Long War Journal*, 17 February 2014, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/02/ansar\\_jerusalem\\_clai\\_8.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/02/ansar_jerusalem_clai_8.php).

<sup>49</sup> "1 killed, 9 injured in 2 suicide attacks in El-Tor, South Sinai", *Ahram Online*, 2 May 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/100306.aspx>.

<sup>50</sup> "Explosion of a 'seized' car bomb in Tor Sinai raises the people's alarm", *ONA*, 5 May 2014, <http://onaeg.com/?p=1646191>.

<sup>51</sup> "Egypt's Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis claims killing of US citizen in Western Desert", *Ahram Online*, 1 December 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/116915.aspx>.

<sup>52</sup> "8 killed in mortar attacks in North Sinai", *Mada Masr*, 14 July 2014, <http://www.madamasr.com/news/8-killed-mortar-attacks-north-sinai>.

<sup>53</sup> P. Kingsley, "Sinai jihadist group says it has beheaded four men", *The Guardian*, 28 August 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/28/sinai-jihaidst-beheads-ansar-beit-al-maqdis>.

<sup>54</sup> Y. Mohammed, "Islamist militants leave signed note on beheaded corpse in Sinai: residents", *Reuters*, 10 September 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-sinai-beheading-idUSKBN0H51M120140910>.

debatable whether these punishments were inspired by the well-known IS tactic, as was commonly reported at the time.

### 3.6 Cross-border attacks

Perhaps responding to Morsi's ouster the previous day, on 4 July 2013 ABM fired two rockets at Eilat.<sup>55</sup> On 9 August an ABM rocket squad was preparing another cross-border launch from Rafah when an Israeli airstrike killed four of the militants.<sup>56</sup> Days later, on 13 August, the Gaza-based Mujahideen Shura Council claimed the retaliatory launching of a rocket at Eilat from Sinai, showing a clear connection between the two salafi jihadist groups on opposite sides of the Sinai-Gaza border.<sup>57</sup>

However, as ABM turned its sights on Egyptian security forces the group lost its foundational focus on attacking Israel. After four months of cross-border quiet ABM launched two rockets at Eilat in January 2014. "[O]ur war with the enemy inside will not make us forget the prime enemy of the (Muslim) nation [Israel], who occupies the land and defiles the sacred places", the group declared in its claim of responsibility.<sup>58</sup>

Yet, despite this warning, ABM remained focused on internal matters until July 2014 and another round of fighting between Israel and Gaza-factions led by the ruling Hamas. That month, there were nine separate rocket attacks against Israel from Sinai, using a total of 24 rockets.<sup>59</sup> In August another two attacks launched six rockets from Sinai into Israel.<sup>60</sup>

According to an Israeli government document, it was no coincidence that ABM fired rockets from Sinai during the 2014 Gaza war, nor did it participate in the violence out of a sense of camaraderie. The Israelis believe Hamas "view[s] the Sinai Peninsula as a hinterland for launching attacks against Israel". So as not to carry out such attacks itself, Hamas "encouraged and aided" ABM to launch strikes from Sinai. Indeed, at the end of that war, an Israeli airstrike killed two Hamas military leaders that both the Israeli and Egyptian governments claimed were involved in Hamas-ABM cooperation<sup>61</sup>—a relationship that has continued through the different stages of ABM/Wilayat Sinai.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>55</sup> "2013 Annual Summary".

<sup>56</sup> A. MacSwan, "Four Islamist militants killed in Egypt near Israel: sources", *Reuters*, 9 August 2013, <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE9780TB20130809?irpc=932>; A. Sweilam, "Officials: Israeli drone strike kills 5 in Egypt", *Associated Press*, 9 August 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/officials-israeli-drone-strike-kills-5-egypt>; and J. Khoury, G. Cohen, and *Associated Press*, "Egyptian officials: Israeli drone strikes Sinai rocket-launching site, kills five", *Haaretz*, 11 August 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/premium-1.540699>.

<sup>57</sup> "Monthly Summary – August 2013", Israel Security Agency, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/English/EnTerrorData/Reports/Pages/Aug13report.aspx>.

<sup>58</sup> N. al-Mughrabi and D. Williams, "Egyptian militants claim rocket attack on Israel's Eilat", *Reuters*, 21 January 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/21/us-israel-egypt-rockets-idUSBREA0K0ZX20140121>.

<sup>59</sup> "Monthly Report – July 2014", Israel Security Agency, pp. 3-4, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionDocuments/%D7%93%D7%95%D7%97%20%D7%97%D7%95%D7%93%D7%A9%D7%99%20%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%99%202014.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> "Monthly Report – August 2014", Israel Security Agency, p. 3, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionDocuments/%D7%93%D7%95%D7%97%20%D7%97%D7%95%D7%93%D7%A9%D7%99%20%D7%90%D7%95%D7%92%D7%95%D7%A1%D7%98%202014.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Y. Zitun, "Profile of a terrorist: Hamas abduction chief planned 'July War'", *Ynet News*, 22 August 2014, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4561967,00.html>.

<sup>62</sup> As seen in this example of Hamas providing assistance to ABM for attacking Israel from Sinai, the relationship between Hamas and Sinai's militants is primarily transactional and exists despite ideological

When the 2014 Gaza war ended, the Sinai-Israel border returned to quiet—and remained so for close to a year.

## 4. November 2014-Present

The October 2014 Karam al Qawadis VBIED and commando-style assault was the announcement event for ABM's next—and latest—phase: pledging allegiance to IS in Syria and Iraq. On 10 November 2014 ABM released an audio statement announcing its oath of loyalty to the so-call Caliphate: "In accordance with the teachings of the Prophet, we announce our allegiance to the Caliphate, and call on Muslims everywhere to do the same".<sup>63</sup>

ABM's pledge was coordinated to occur on the same day as similar ones from salafi jihadist groups in Libya, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.<sup>64</sup> On 13 November, an audio message from IS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi declared the "nullification" of ABM and the other groups and "the announcement of new *wilayat* (provinces) of the Islamic State".<sup>65</sup> In response, that evening ABM announced its rebranding as Wilayat Sinai on Twitter.<sup>66</sup>

The details regarding ABM's pledge of fealty to IS—and the understanding of the operational relationship between the groups—are still evolving. It is widely believed that the affiliation was primarily about ABM's need for financial support, and interlocutors with militants in Sinai made the case that the group's operations would not change. In perhaps the most in-depth analysis of the ABM pledge, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross argued that a mixture of financial need and leadership losses in Sinai drove ABM into the arms of IS, which had been actively courting the Egyptian salafi jihadist group.<sup>67</sup>

Even if the need for financial support was the main driver, there already was affinity for IS among Sinai's fighters—some Sinai-based militants likely gained valuable fighting skills alongside IS members in Syria and Iraq, and there was also the matter of ideological agreement.<sup>68</sup> Since January 2014, ABM spiritual guide Abu Usama al Masri had spoken positively about IS' campaigns in Syria and Iraq.<sup>69</sup> Al Masri— the group's

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differences. For more, see B. Berti and Z. Gold, " Hamas, the Islamic State, and the Gaza-Sinai Crucible", *Sada*, 12 January 2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=62448>.

<sup>63</sup> P. Kingsley, M. Chulov, and L. Salman, "Egyptian jihadis pledge allegiance to Isis", *The Guardian*, 10 November 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/10/egyptian-jihadists-pledge-allegiance-isis>.

<sup>64</sup> T. Joscelyn, "Islamic State leader claims 'caliphate' has expanded in new audio message", *The Long War Journal*, 13 November 2014, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/11/islamic\\_state\\_leader\\_1.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/11/islamic_state_leader_1.php).

<sup>65</sup> A. Zelin, "The Islamic State's Archipelago of Provinces", The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 14 November 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-states-archipelago-of-provinces>.

<sup>66</sup> @6Ansar\_B\_Almqds, Twitter, 13 November 2014. Account since suspended.

<sup>67</sup> D. Gartenstein-Ross, "Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis's Oath of Allegiance to the Islamic State", Wikistrat, February 2015, <http://www.wikistrat.com/ansar-bayt-al-maqdiss-oath-of-allegiance-to-the-islamic-state-report-released/>.

<sup>68</sup> Z. Gold, "Wilayat Sinai: The Islamic State's Egyptian Affiliate", in Y. Schweitzer and O. Einav, eds., *The Islamic State: How Viable Is It?* (Tel Aviv: INSS, 2016), pp. 197-8, <http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/IslamicStateENG5.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> J. Garnett, "An Islamic State in Sinai", *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, no. 29 (2015), p. 17, <http://www.securityaffairs.org/issues/number-28/islamic-state-sinai>.



most public personality, who was reportedly one of the ABM leaders that facilitated its joining the so-called Caliphate<sup>70</sup>—repeated this praise in his high profile Eid al Fitr sermon in July 2014.<sup>71</sup>

## 4.1 Concentrating on the Peninsula

The emergence of Wilayat Sinai opened a fracturing of the organisation between the peninsula-based Wilayat Sinai and the remaining mainland cells and jihadist supporters that worked with ABM and had been responsible for its operations outside Sinai from 2013-2014. Western officials told *The New York Times* that mainland cells “worried that [IS’] reputation for careless violence will alienate other Egyptians”, especially in light of the lessons of Egypt’s 1990s terrorism against the tourism sector.<sup>72</sup> During that era, the Islamic Group and al Jihad waged a campaign of terrorism and insurgency in Cairo and Upper Egypt against the Egyptian state culminating in the 1997 massacre of 62 foreign tourists at the Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor. As Joseph Wheatley and Clark McCauley later concluded, although “many Egyptians sympathised with the militants, who claimed to struggle on their behalf against inequality and corruption.... the Luxor massacre moved many Egyptians from sympathy and support to hostility toward and even action against the extremists”.<sup>73</sup>

The most impactful defection resulting from IS’ pledge was that of Hisham al Ashmawy, a former Egyptian special forces officer, who reportedly had masterminded the attempted assassination of the interior minister, the coordinated attack in Farafra, and a number of other marquee ABM operations. From eastern Libya, Al Ashmawy’s group maintained an allegiance to al Qaeda. The former officer later released audio statements that threatened the Egyptian regime, though his group has not claimed any attacks.

Even after losing its most skilled elements outside the peninsula, Wilayat Sinai still could be effective in mainland Egypt. In its first month under the IS banner, the group displayed its nationwide reach by dispatching a unit that killed five officers in Qalyubiya and Cairo governorates during nationwide Islamist demonstrations on 28 November.<sup>74</sup> Days later, Wilayat Sinai also released photographs of the passport and work identification of the deceased William Henderson: the American killed in western Egypt that summer. Although it never claimed responsibility, investigations concluded that the group was also behind the 13 November hijacking of an Egyptian naval vessel in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, “Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis’s Oath of Allegiance to the Islamic State” (2015).

<sup>71</sup> A. al Maşri, “Sermon of ‘Id from the Sinai”, *Jihadology*, 31 July 2014, <http://jihadology.net/2014/07/31/new-video-message-from-jamaat-an%E1%B9%A3ar-bayt-al-maqdis-abu-usamah-al-ma%E1%B9%A3ri-sermon-of-id-from-the-sinai/>.

<sup>72</sup> D. Kirkpatrick, “Militant Group in Egypt Vows Loyalty to ISIS”, *The New York Times*, 10 November 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/11/world/middleeast/egyptian-militant-group-pledges-loyalty-to-isis.html>.

<sup>73</sup> J. Wheatley and C. McCauley, “Losing your audience: Desistance from terrorism in Egypt after Luxor”, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 1, no. 3 (2008), pp. 256-7, <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F17467580902853051>.

<sup>74</sup> “‘State of Sinai’ claim attacks as part of ‘Islamic Youth Uprising’”, *Daily News Egypt*, 29 November 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/2014/11/29/state-sinai-claim-attacks-part-islamic-youth-uprising/>; and J. Gulhane, Twitter, 29 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/jgulhane/status/538601072856948736>.

<sup>75</sup> M. Rizk, “‘Full-fledged war’ across Egypt as navy attacked for first time, experts say”, *Ahram Online*, 13 November 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/115474.aspx>; and Awad and Tadros, “Bay’a Remorse?” (2015).



However, Wilayat Sinai instead prioritised consolidating what could be considered control in the north-eastern triangle of the Sinai Peninsula. On 13 November, Wilayat Sinai militants killed three soldiers and two police conscripts traveling off-duty in two separate incidents.<sup>76</sup> The group's use of roving checkpoints turned areas east of al Arish into "no-go zones" for Egypt's security forces.<sup>77</sup> This point was reiterated in January 2015 when Wilayat Sinai released a video of its militants pulling police Captain Ayman al Desouki from a civilian car, coercing him to confess ministry of interior abuses against Muslim women and students, and shooting him in the head.<sup>78</sup>

## 4.2 Increase in Attacks, and in Propaganda

In the final months of ABM and since the rebranding as Wilayat Sinai, the group more thoroughly documented its attacks. Whereas the small IED and shooting incidents went unclaimed from before autumn 2014, since then Wilayat Sinai has claimed attacks on military and police vehicles and checkpoints on a near-daily basis.

These claims were supported by IS' proficient media machine, as the foreign group took responsibility for the Sinai organisation's "media office" after the latter pledged allegiance to the former.<sup>79</sup> Wilayat Sinai benefited from IS' media savvy and editing skills, while activities in Sinai allowed the so-called Caliphate to present its continued expansion throughout the Middle East. The Wilayat Sinai media office released monthly accountings of all the group's claimed attacks, videos and photographs of operations, and campfire accounts of salafi jihadists luring potential recruits with stories of their daily lives.

In addition to using its propaganda to recruit, some of Wilayat Sinai's messaging was intended to intimidate Egypt's security forces both with direct threats and with images of attacks. Occasionally the group would mock the security forces' efforts by, for example, displaying images of reportedly dead militant leaders. Another photo series Wilayat Sinai has produced shows destruction in North Sinai, allegedly caused by the Egyptian military or Israeli operations, to further sour local opinions of the Egyptian state.

A final subject of Wilayat Sinai's media is alleging governance activities to show it controls and has authority over territory. These releases include obligations of religious authorities, such as declaring the start of Ramadan; policing duties like patrolling the streets and halting drugs and cigarette smuggling; and offering social services such as distributing food aid and handing out financial assistance. Wilayat Sinai first issued a photo essay of destroying cigarettes in January 2015. In March 2016 the group went so far as to reference such actions as morality control by an "Islamic police".

<sup>76</sup> Y. Mohamed, "Five Egyptian security personnel killed in Sinai gun attacks", *Reuters*, 13 November 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-attacks-sinai-idUSKCN0IX15Z20141113>.

<sup>77</sup> S. Frenkel and M. Atef, "Despite Ongoing Egyptian Military Campaign In Sinai, Militant Groups Gaining Ground", *Buzzfeed News*, 30 January 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/sheerafrenkel/despite-ongoing-egyptian-military-campaign-in-sinai-militant>.

<sup>78</sup> "Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis releases video of 'policeman's execution'", *Ahram Online*, 26 January 2015, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/121404.aspx>.

<sup>79</sup> A. Zelin, "The Islamic State's model", *The Washington Post*, 28 January 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/01/28/the-islamic-states-model/>.

### 4.3 Advanced Weaponry and Massive Attacks

In September 2015 one Wilayat Sinai photo essay showed recruits in a training course on the use of anti-tank missiles and MANPADS: advanced weaponry the group was already using effectively. On 14 June 2015 Wilayat Sinai's Twitter account claimed the first use of a Kornet anti-tank missile.<sup>80</sup> Although ABM had used anti-tank missiles even before calling itself ABM, the group emphasised the weapon's use from June 2015 to show an advancement in its hardware. In July, Wilayat Sinai even used an anti-tank missile to target an Egyptian naval craft off the coast of Rafah.<sup>81</sup>

In its first "Mujahid Diary" photo essay in February 2015, Wilayat Sinai included an image of a militant carrying a MANPADS. The caption claimed that the weapon targeted an Egyptian army aircraft, but the group provided no evidence of a hit. Indeed, despite a handful of claimed uses of MANPADS, Wilayat Sinai never provided evidence of success to match the January 2014 takedown of a military helicopter.<sup>82</sup>

By some accounts, however, MANPADS "are being used by the insurgents to devastating effect against Egyptian Army helicopters".<sup>83</sup> Although there has been no documented downing, it seems the anti-aircraft weapons are being used by Wilayat Sinai to deter Egypt military access to and freedom of operation over North Sinai.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to the more frequent use of advanced weapons, and the increase in small attacks, Wilayat Sinai built on ABM's October 2014 operation and carried out further massive, multi-pronged operations in January, April, and July 2015. On 29 January Wilayat Sinai's fighters targeted ten security checkpoints almost simultaneously throughout North Sinai, including dispatching suicide VBIEDs to attack the headquarters of the feared Battalion 101 in a secure area of al Arish.<sup>85</sup> At least 30 soldiers were killed in the attacks.

Two separate coordinated incidents in April 2015 killed around 30 security men and civilians. On 2 April militants attacked two different army checkpoints with VBIEDs, followed by armed assaults. Although fifteen of the attackers were allegedly killed by counter-fire, this incident displayed Wilayat Sinai's new willingness to stay and fight instead of carrying out the hit-and-run attacks demonstrative of ABM's tactics.<sup>86</sup> Ten days later, a suicide bomber rammed through barricades and detonated his vehicle at a police station in al Arish, killing eight and wounding 45.<sup>87</sup> The Arish bombing came

<sup>80</sup> @GAREB1333, Twitter, 14 June 2015. Account since suspended.

<sup>81</sup> "Egypt navy ship 'hit by Sinai militants' missile", *BBC News*, 16 July 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33557180>.

<sup>82</sup> S. Al-Atrush, Twitter, 3 July 2015, <https://twitter.com/sameralatrush/status/616968643138711552>.

<sup>83</sup> "Jamestown Board Visit to Egypt", The Jamestown Foundation, 29 May 2015.

<sup>84</sup> J. Garnett, Twitter, 3 July 2015, <https://twitter.com/jantzengarnett/status/616974893704474624>.

<sup>85</sup> "Wilayat Sinai targets Egyptian army stronghold", *Al-Monitor*, 4 February 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2015/02/egypt-sinai-wilaya-attacks-army.html>.

<sup>86</sup> D. Kirkpatrick, "Militants Carry Out Deadly Attacks on Army Checkpoints in North Sinai", *The New York Times*, 2 April 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/03/world/middleeast/egypt-militants-attack-sinai-checkpoints.html>; and "Egypt: Sinai peninsula attack kills 17", *BBC News*, 2 April 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32158096>.

<sup>87</sup> "Egypt's Sinai Peninsula hit by deadly bomb attacks", *BBC News*, 12 April 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-3227286>.

hours after two attacks targeting a fuel tanker and an armoured vehicle killed six other soldiers.<sup>88</sup>

These attacks showed continuous advancements in militants' capabilities and technical fighting skills in Sinai, but they continued a trend of attacking security forces that had been developing since 2013. The trend line jumped on 1 July 2015 in a Wilayat Sinai operation—named after ABM founding leader Freij—that resembled IS manoeuvres in Iraq more than anything that had been seen prior in North Sinai.

On the morning of 1 July, Wilayat Sinai's fighters simultaneously targeted around fifteen Egyptian security checkpoints, focusing in and around the city of Sheikh Zuweid.<sup>89</sup> Using IEDs, suicide bombs, RPGs, Kornets, and MANPADS, salafi jihadists laid siege to parts of the city from around 12:00 to 19:00. As the Tahrir Institute properly described it, "the number and length of operations, along with the ability to overtake multiple military instalments and a heavily secured city with over sixty thousand inhabitants, are unparalleled in Egypt's contemporary fight against terrorism".<sup>90</sup> To break the siege, Egypt's armed forces deployed F-16s to bombard the city with airstrikes.

Officially, seventeen soldiers were killed, whereas Wilayat Sinai claimed to have killed more than a hundred.<sup>91</sup> The number of reported deaths of soldiers, police, and civilians varied widely, however.<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile, in its first account of the day's events, Egypt's military estimated approximately 70 militants were involved in attacks.<sup>93</sup> It followed up immediately with air strikes on two large gatherings of suspected militants.<sup>94</sup> Between 1-5 July the military reportedly killed 241 suspected militants in operations repelling and retaliating for the attacks, including more than 100 on 1 July alone.<sup>95</sup>

1 July was an aberration. In its Twitter updates of the operation, Wilayat Sinai admitted "humiliation" as it retreated from Sheikh Zuweid.<sup>96</sup> Egypt's military made clear that despite its lack of full control of the northeast corner of Sinai it certainly would not cede territory to Wilayat Sinai. The group attempted to replicate the manner in which IS forces swept through northwest Iraq, learning in defeat that the Egyptian army was not the Iraqi army. To date, it has not tried again.

## 4.4 Expanding Targets

In addition to the increasing size and complexity of its attacks, Wilayat Sinai also expanded its targets. ABM presented itself as the defender of the local population

<sup>88</sup> K. Fahim and M. Thomas, "Sinai Group Kills Officers in Bombings", *The New York Times*, 12 April 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/13/world/middleeast/sinai-group-kills-officers-in-bombings.html>.

<sup>89</sup> "Assault in Sheikh Zuweid: A turning point in Egypt's fight against terrorism", The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2 July 2015, <http://timep.org/commentary/assault-in-sheikh-zuwaid-a-turning-point-in-egypts-fight-against-terrorism-2/>.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> J. Khoury and Reuters, "At Least 50 Egyptian Soldiers Killed in Sinai Terror Attacks", *Haaretz*, 1 July 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.663864>.

<sup>93</sup> Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, Facebook, 1 July 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/680778872053098>.

<sup>94</sup> Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, Facebook, 1 July 2015 (2), <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/680967745367544>.

<sup>95</sup> "241 militants killed in past 5 days in North Sinai - army spokesman", *Aswat Masriya*, 6 July 2015, <http://en.aswatmasriya.com/news/details/10856>.

<sup>96</sup> "Assault in Sheikh Zuweid" (2015).

against alleged abuses of the Egyptian state. Although Wilayat Sinai continued to claim such abuses, the group took a much harder turn against North Sinai residents.

As noted above, Wilayat Sinai's patrols stopped smugglers from transporting lucrative contraband of which the group disapproved: cigarettes and drugs. Such action may build the group's religious credibility, but it also raises the likelihood of provoking criminal smuggling enterprises. Wilayat Sinai also tempts the wrath of Sinai's tribes by overtly threatening and claiming responsibility for attacks on tribal leaders and their property.<sup>97</sup> Bedouin leaders that tried to organise opposition to Wilayat Sinai or that worked with the Egyptian government have had their homes blown up in North Sinai, with militants boasting they will do the same to any challengers.

Some of those killed were known or rumoured to assist Egyptian security forces. Wilayat Sinai may have killed other alleged "challengers" as a warning to prospective ones or out of a growing paranoia under sustained military strikes. This is highlighted by Wilayat Sinai's campaign against alleged "spies". As noted above, ABM killed perhaps a dozen civilians over two years that the group charged with spying for or collaborating with Egypt and Israel. In January 2015 alone, there were 36 attacks on North Sinai civilians.<sup>98</sup> In November 2015 Wilayat Sinai released a summary of its entire year's operations, claiming it had killed upwards of 130 "spies of the apostate army" in that time.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to increased attacks on the peninsula's civilian population, Wilayat Sinai expanded what it considered legitimate state targets to include the Egyptian judiciary. On 16 May 2015, a microbus full of Egyptian judges was gunned down in al Arish. The attack came hours after former President Morsi was sentenced to death, but it is unclear if that ruling precipitated the attack or was merely coincidental—the judges came into the governorate that day to preside over a number of local cases.

On 17 May Egypt executed six ABM members tried as part of the so-called "Arab Sharkas" cell, which was raided in Qalyubiya governorate in March 2014. Three days later, Wilayat Sinai released an audio message in which Abu Usama al Masri called the judiciary a legitimate target because "it is wrong for the tyrants to jail our brothers".<sup>100</sup> The group's social media campaign circulating the statement linked the declaration to the execution of its members, using the hashtag "Arab Sharkas".

On 24 November 2015 the group again targeted Egyptian judges, attacking the Swiss Inn hotel in al Arish. Judges were gathered at the hotel to count parliamentary elections results in the governorate. Wilayat Sinai sent a suicide bomber in a VBIED, but he was repelled and forced to detonate before reaching the hotel.<sup>101</sup> Meanwhile, another suicide bomber stormed into the Swiss Inn, where he detonated a bomb vest in the kitchen. A third militant managed to gun down a judge.

<sup>97</sup> "Conflicting reports over Tarabin 'war' on Sinai militants", *Mada Masr*, 28 April 2015, <http://www.madamasr.com/news/conflicting-reports-over-tarabin-war-sinai-militants>.

<sup>98</sup> Z. Gold, "North Sinai Population Continues to Sacrifice for Egypt", The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 18 May 2015, <http://timep.org/commentary/north-sinai-population-continues-to-sacrifice-for-egypt/>.

<sup>99</sup> M. Awad, Twitter, 12 November 2015, [https://twitter.com/mokhtar\\_awad/status/664765933379051521](https://twitter.com/mokhtar_awad/status/664765933379051521).

<sup>100</sup> M. Georgy and S. Kalin, "Islamic State's Egypt affiliate urges attacks on judges: recording", *Reuters*, 20 May 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/20/us-egypt-judges-militants-idUSKBN0052R920150520>.

<sup>101</sup> "Seven killed in North Sinai militant attacks on hotel housing judges", *Ahram Online*, 24 November 2015, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/171560.aspx>.

## 4.5 International Agenda

In addition to expanding its Egyptian targets, Wilayat Sinai also broadened both its propaganda and attacks to better reflect IS' program. The adoption of an international agenda has been of concern since ABM first pledged allegiance to IS.<sup>102</sup> Wilayat Sinai's international focus developed slowly, indeed primarily being observed only in its propaganda, not its actions. However, the group's pattern became worryingly clear by the end of 2015.<sup>103</sup>

At its origins in November 2014, Wilayat Sinai needed to stand out for its IS benefactor. ABM was the most proficient and deadly salafi jihadist group to heed the so-called Caliphate's call, but its focus was entirely local. A solution seemed to appear in the group's messaging: continue with the standard attacks, but frame them in an IS context. The obvious target that fitted both local and international narratives was the Sinai gas pipeline network. In its first video message in November 2014 Wilayat Sinai showed footage of an earlier strike on the gas pipeline that extended to Jordan: "God willing, not a drop of gas will reach Jordan until the caliph permits it".<sup>104</sup> In January 2015, claiming a new attack on the pipeline, Wilayat Sinai specifically linked the pipeline attack—the latest of dozens over four years—to Jordan's participation in the international coalition fighting IS in Iraq and Syria.<sup>105</sup>

Wilayat Sinai's willingness to retaliate against the anti-IS coalition in its area of operations is of great concern to the MFO, which has faced increased harassment by salafi jihadist militants in the past year.<sup>106</sup> Seven of the twelve nations that contribute forces to the MFO also either are involved directly in combat against IS (Australia, Canada, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States) or provide arms to local forces (the Czech Republic).

Wilayat Sinai regularly conducts attacks on Egyptian positions around the MFO's North Camp base. In June 2015, the group directly attacked North Camp with rockets and mortars while attempting a follow-on raid.<sup>107</sup> In the first claimed militant strike in the MFO's history, Wilayat Sinai referred to the peacekeepers as a "crusader force" stationed in the peninsula to protect Israel.<sup>108</sup> Unclaimed attacks have also put MFO personnel at risk. In a July 2015 incident, unconfirmed by the MFO, Minnesota National

<sup>102</sup> "Islamic State Allegiance Could Cost Egypt's Sinai Jihadis Popular Support", *World Politics Review*, 18 November 2014, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/14479/islamic-state-allegiance-could-cost-egypt-s-sinai-jihadis-popular-support>.

<sup>103</sup> Z. Gold, "The Islamic State's Pattern of Retaliation in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula", Atlantic Council, 12 November 2015, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/the-islamic-state-s-pattern-of-retaliation-in-egypt-s-sinai-peninsula>.

<sup>104</sup> "Egypt's Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis claims responsibility for deadly attack on soldiers", *Ahram Online*, 15 November 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/115554.aspx>.

<sup>105</sup> "Egypt jihadists claim attack on Sinai pipeline to Jordan", *Agence France-Presse*, 19 January 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Jan-19/284619-egypt-jihadists-claim-attack-on-sinai-pipeline-to-jordan.ashx>.

<sup>106</sup> Z. Gold, "Sinai Militancy and the Threat to International Forces", *Strategic Assessment* 18, no. 2 (2015), pp. 35-45, [http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18\\_2ENG\\_3\\_Gold.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18_2ENG_3_Gold.pdf).

<sup>107</sup> A. Connolly, "Canadian peacekeepers in Sinai unequipped to deal with ISIS insurgency, experts warn", *iPolitics*, 3 September 2015, <http://ipolitics.ca/2015/09/03/canadian-peacekeepers-in-sinai-unequipped-to-deal-with-isis-insurgency-experts-warn/>.

<sup>108</sup> D. Kirkpatrick, "Militants Hit Karnak Temple, in 2nd Recent Attack on Egyptian Tourist Sites", *The New York Times*, 10 June 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/11/world/middleeast/karnak-temple-luxor-egypt-attack.html>.

Guard medics serving in the Force reportedly responded to a “mass casualty event” in which a militant attack on a checkpoint injured at least fourteen MFO troops.<sup>109</sup> More widely reported, in September 2015 roadside IEDs near an MFO outpost injured at least six Fijian and American troops.<sup>110</sup> This is not to mention harassment of and assaults on local MFO employees and contractors.

In a July 2015 incident reminiscent of William Henderson’s August 2014 murder, a Croatian was kidnapped while driving from Cairo into the Western Desert. Tomislav Salopek was employed by CGG, a French geoscience company, involved in Egypt’s energy sector.<sup>111</sup> Weeks later, Wilayat Sinai released a video of Salopek in an orange jumpsuit—a familiar outfit for IS victims, used to parallel US prisoners at Guantanamo Bay—begging for his life: Wilayat Sinai would kill him, he said, if Egypt did not release what was vaguely described as “Muslim women” from its prisons.

The odd demand was more ABM than Wilayat Sinai, calling out the Egyptian government’s alleged abuses; and the direct attack against the energy sector also fitted a local, “economic war” agenda. However, this shifted over the coming days as the group’s Twitter feed circulated news articles of Croatian military aid to the Iraqi army and Kurdish forces fighting IS. When Wilayat Sinai released the photo of a beheaded Salopek on 12 August, the group specifically claimed it killed him “due to his country’s participation in the war against Islamic State”.<sup>112</sup>

As explained in this section, Wilayat Sinai was slow to develop its targeting: attempting to fit IS’ brand with rhetoric more than action. However, any doubt that the group indeed was carrying out an international agenda was shattered on 31 October 2015 when the group claimed responsibility for the crash of Metrojet flight 9268, full of Russian tourists returning home from South Sinai’s Sharm al Sheikh.<sup>113</sup> All indications suggest Wilayat Sinai infiltrated the resort city’s airport and planted an IED on the Metrojet aircraft. Notably, none of Wilayat Sinai’s statements about the attack referred to the close ties between the Egyptian and Russian governments. Instead, the death of all 224 on board was framed entirely as retaliation for Russian airstrikes in Syria and Moscow’s alliance with Damascus.

As noted above in discussion of the mainland/peninsula split between ABM supporters after the latter group formally joined IS, the rarity of attacks against tourists in the midst of Egypt’s post-revolutionary political violence can be viewed in the context of the consequences for the entire Egyptian population of such targeting. Egypt’s economy—and, perhaps more important, its people—is dependent on the tourism sector. Brendan Meighan, of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, wrote following the Metrojet crash that “the direct, indirect, and induced effects of tourism in Egypt in 2014 accounted for almost 3 million jobs, or 11.6 percent of total employment, and

<sup>109</sup> “Minnesota medical support team welcomed home from Egypt deployment”, *Star Tribune*, 29 August 2015, <http://www.startribune.com/minnesota-medical-support-team-welcomed-home-from-egypt-deployment/323334351/>.

<sup>110</sup> D. Chiacu and P. Stewart, “Sinai blasts injure six peacekeepers, including four Americans: Pentagon”, *Reuters*, 3 September 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/04/us-egypt-sinai-peacekeepers-idUSKCNOR404G20150904>.

<sup>111</sup> “Hostage deadline passes with no word on his fate”, *Agence France-Presse*, 8 August 2015, <http://www.gulf-times.com/story/450463/Hostage-deadline-passes-with-no-word-on-his-fate>.

<sup>112</sup> O. Fahmy and I. Ilic, “Islamic State’s Egyptian ally says it beheads Croat - SITE”, *Reuters*, 12 August 2015, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-egypt-croatia-hostage-idUKKCN0QH1EF20150812>.

<sup>113</sup> Z. Gold, “Wilayat Sinai risks backlash after Metrojet bombing”, *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 11 (2015), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/wilayat-sinai-risks-backlash-after-%E2%80%A8metrojet-bombing>.



resulted in EGP 255.0 billion of economic activity, or 12.8 percent of GDP. Direct contributions from tourism resulted in EGP 117.2 billion, or 5.9 percent of GDP".<sup>114</sup>

The effect of Metrojet bombing is even starker when considering that it specifically targeted Russians in a tourist resort city frequented by European vacationers. According to Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, in 2014 Europeans made up 76.7 percent of Egypt's almost 9.9 million tourist visitors.<sup>115</sup> Meighan also noted that the tourism sector's anticipated recovery in 2015—tourism arrivals had increased 8.2 percent year-on-year in the first half of 2015<sup>116</sup>—was meant to drive down unemployment and lift foreign currency reserves. As an indication of the sector's slide, four months after the crash, Egyptian prime minister Sherif Ismail noted that the country had lost nearly \$1.3 billion in lost tourist revenue;<sup>117</sup> and official statistics from February 2016 showed a 45.9 percent year-on-year drop in visitors: including a 99 percent decrease in Russians.<sup>118</sup> By one account, terrorism and political violence broadly in post-2011 Egypt has resulted in the loss of five million tourism sector jobs.<sup>119</sup>

Given the economic costs incurred by attacks on tourists, it is clear why Wilayat Sinai—and IS more broadly across the region—would target this sector. However, such attacks also may be counterproductive because in the process of damaging the state Wilayat Sinai also harms regular Egyptian people working in fields related to tourism. Writing about the 1997 Luxor massacre, Wheatley and McCauley noted that attacks on tourists “produced economic hardship among strata of the social pyramid that had supported”, or at least tolerated, radical Islamist groups and their violent agendas.<sup>120</sup> The population of North Sinai may not benefit from the tourism sector, but attacks on tourists lower prospects that Wilayat Sinai could expand both beyond its North Sinai base of operations and among Muslim Brotherhood members and sympathisers in the mainland that otherwise may approve of the salafi jihadist group's attacks on Egyptian security forces and the state. Wilayat Sinai's mass murder of tourists demonstrates the group's willingness to risk local support to carry out IS' agenda.

## 4.6 Israel

ABM's initial target was Israel, and that country has been a featured target of Wilayat Sinai propaganda since the group's rebranding. In its November 2014 video, the group linked its fight in Egypt to a longer campaign to destroy Israel, since the first step to “liberate Al-Aqsa Mosque is by purifying all land from Jewish agents, like El-Sisi's army”.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>114</sup> B. Meighan, “The Economic Fallout of the Metrojet Crash”, Atlantic Council, 2 December 2015, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/the-economic-fallout-of-the-metrojet-crash>.

<sup>115</sup> “Tourism”, in *Statistical Yearbook* (Cairo: Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2015), [http://www.capmas.gov.eg/Pages/StaticPages.aspx?page\\_id=5034](http://www.capmas.gov.eg/Pages/StaticPages.aspx?page_id=5034).

<sup>116</sup> “Number of tourists in Egypt rose by 8.2 pct in 2015: CAPMAS”, *Ahram Online*, 26 September 2015, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/144419.aspx>.

<sup>117</sup> O. Fahmy, “Egypt's tourism revenues down \$1.3 billion since Russian plane crash”, *Reuters*, 29 February 2016, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-egypt-tourism-revenues-idUKKCN0W22L7>.

<sup>118</sup> M. Ayyad, “Tourism inflow declines by 45.9% in February: CAPMAS”, *Daily News Egypt*, 4 April 2016, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/04/04/tourism-inflow-declines-by-45-9-in-february-capmas/>.

<sup>119</sup> Roundtable with members of Egypt's House of Representatives, Middle East Institute, Washington, 17 March 2016.

<sup>120</sup> Wheatley and McCauley, “Losing your audience” (2008), p. 258.

<sup>121</sup> “Egypt's Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis claims responsibility for deadly attack on soldiers” (2014).



Wilayat Sinai's rhetorical threats against Israel continued throughout the year, including a video released on 1 November 2015 entitled, "From Sinai to Jerusalem".<sup>122</sup> Another video message days later, predicting the defeat of the Egyptian army, warned that IS fighters would "rise up and uproot" Israel "soon".<sup>123</sup>

Given Wilayat Sinai's growth and trajectory, it is likely that a major attack against Israel will come "soon". Indeed, accounts of a 14 January 2016 incident suggest the Egyptian military may have thwarted one.<sup>124</sup> Wilayat Sinai dubbed the operation the "Battle of Sheikh Abu Ali al Qaram". Al Qaram was one of the leaders of the August 2011 multi-pronged attack in southern Israel.<sup>125</sup> In the operation this January, Wilayat Sinai claimed its fighters engaged with Egyptian border guards, and Israel evacuated its crossing into Gaza during a nearby Egyptian aerial bombardment of the militants.<sup>126</sup>

However, despite a year of bluster, the group that was first founded to target Israel fired just a single rocket over the Sinai border on 3 July 2015.<sup>127</sup> Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for targeting Israel with a projectile from North Sinai as if to prove that it was still able to operate despite the pressure of a massive Egyptian offensive in response to the 1 July siege of Sheikh Zuweid.<sup>128</sup>

## 5. Four Major Ways Wilayat Sinai is Different from Ansar Bayt al Maqdis

The above survey of Sinai militancy over five years shows a group that constantly was adapting and advancing its capabilities. Focus shifted from targeting Israel to targeting Egypt; attacks became larger, more frequent, and more complex; and ABM, and then Wilayat Sinai, broadened the scope of targets as its confrontation with Egyptian security forces continued. It is clear that Wilayat Sinai showed advanced operational methods, even if it is unclear whether ABM would have adopted these same capabilities without IS affiliation.

Wilayat Sinai's focus on operations in the peninsula is another continuation from ABM's drop-off in "mainland" attacks from spring 2014. In 2015 Wilayat Sinai claimed just three

<sup>122</sup> Wilayat Sinai, "From the Sinai to Bayt al-Maqdis", *Jihadology*, 1 November 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/11/01/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-from-the-sinai-to-bayt-al-maqdis-wilayat-sayna/>.

<sup>123</sup> Wilayat Sinai, "Then They Are Defeated", *Jihadology*, 10 November 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/11/10/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-then-they-are-defeated-wilayat-sayna/>; and A. Ben Solomon, "ISIS in Sinai threatens to attack Israel", *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 November 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/ISIS-in-Sinai-threatens-to-attack-Israel-432684>.

<sup>124</sup> Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, "Armed Forces thwart an attempt by the takfiri elements in targeting one of the checkpoints south of Sheikh Zuweid", Facebook, 14 January 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/766205013510483>.

<sup>125</sup> J. Garnett, Twitter, 15 January 2016, <https://twitter.com/jantzengarnett/status/687890723555770368>.

<sup>126</sup> N. Daburi, "Kerem Shalom evacuated due to a security alert", *News 2*, 14 January 2016, [http://mobile.mako.co.il/news-military/security-q1\\_2016/Article-2d068b214204251004.htm](http://mobile.mako.co.il/news-military/security-q1_2016/Article-2d068b214204251004.htm).

<sup>127</sup> "Monthly Summary – July 2015", Israel Security Agency, p. 1, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionDocuments/Monthly%20Summary%20%E2%80%93%20July%2015.pdf>.

<sup>128</sup> T. Joscelyn, "Islamic State's Sinai 'province' claims responsibility for failed rocket attacks on Israel", *The Long War Journal*, 3 July 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/07/islamic-states-sinai-province-claims-responsibility-for-failed-rocket-attacks-on-israel.php>.

attacks west of the Suez Canal: a suicide VBIED on the Suez-Cairo road in July, the kidnapping and murder of Salopek, and the October assassination of a police officer in Cairo.

However, even as Wilayat Sinai focused on consolidation in the peninsula, the so-called Caliphate put the mainland in its sights. From July 2015, IS itself directly claimed several attacks in the Cairo area and one in the Western Desert. These attacks began with a VBIED outside the Italian consulate in downtown Cairo and included bomb attacks against a national security office in Qalyubiya in August and a branch office of the foreign ministry in September, as well as a shooting attack against Arab tourists of Israeli citizenship at their hotel near the Pyramids in January 2016.

The statements matched IS claims of operations outside its “provinces”, such as those in Tunisia and Paris. However, by claiming the attacks out of Raqqa—IS’ Syrian capital—the actual perpetrators were masked. Some appeared linked to Wilayat Sinai, such as the Qalyubiya bombing that was claimed to have been carried out to avenge the ABM cell killed and arrested there (the Arab Sharkas cell). Others may signify the emergence of IS cells in the mainland: such as the string of January-February 2016 attacks in Giza, an Islamist stronghold that had been an operational base for another salafi jihadist group, Afnan Misr, before its 2015 decapitation.

Other IS attacks hint at salafi jihadist operations in eastern Libya leaking into Egypt. Of course, activity in the Western Desert—near the border—is a primary example of this. The attack on the Italian consulate, too, may have had its roots in Libya, where that country’s former colonial master is greatly involved in solving the current political impasse.

Back in Sinai, the modern history of militancy in the peninsula shows some clear differences since ABM pledged allegiance to IS.

## 5.1 Threat to the Local Population

As described above, Wilayat Sinai is clearly a direct and indirect threat to the local population. Whereas ABM presented itself as a defender of the local population against Egypt’s security forces, Wilayat Sinai has spent more than a year murdering locals and burning down their homes. Meanwhile its large attacks on Egyptian soldiers and police increasingly put civilians in harm’s way—to say nothing of its laying siege to areas of North Sinai’s third most populous city, Sheikh Zuweid, in July 2015.

The relationship between Sinai’s salafi jihadists and the peninsula’s broader population is a complicated one. Militancy in Sinai is mostly home-grown out of the peninsula’s political and economic isolation from Cairo, though influenced by salafi jihadist ideology from Gaza and further abroad. Mohannad Sabry, in his recent book, documents how a confluence of the breakdown in both state and tribal structures drove the growth of support for Islamic governance—which, in addition to political grievances against the state, laid the foundation of support for anti-state violence in the name of Islam.<sup>129</sup> As the growth of ABM—and especially the emergence of an IS branch—is tied to the weakness of traditional Sinai order, the tribal dynamics are more complex than tribe A supporting the militants and tribe B supporting the state.

<sup>129</sup> Sabry, *Sinai* (2015), pp. 109-160.

Broadly, salafi jihadists pull recruits from among the tribes, while tribal leaders publicly have denied support for Wilayat Sinai and ABM before it.<sup>130</sup> The group's main "base of operations" is along the Egyptian-Israeli border, in sparsely populated villages south of Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid, in what is considered to be territory of the Sawarka tribe—from which ABM leaders like Shadi al Menai hail. Being in the conflict zone makes it riskier for Sawarka leaders to push back; but that is not to suggest that the tribe fully supports the militants. Indeed, there have been instances of fighting among members of the Sawarka tribe that support and oppose Wilayat Sinai—and even conflicts between members of the tribe's Menai clan.

Opposition is more palatable—and necessary—for tribes with territory bordering Wilayat Sinai's base. This is most obvious for the Tarabin, whose traditional tribal land is south of the area in which Wilayat Sinai has consolidated<sup>131</sup>—and is a target for the group's territorial expansion.<sup>132</sup> Despite occasional forays into central and South Sinai, which would require traversing Tarabin land, the tribe claims to have pushed back the salafi jihadist group and halted attempts to connect a route from northeast Sinai into the mountainous centre.<sup>133</sup> Wilayat Sinai has boasted about killing members of the Rumeilat, Sawarka, Tarabin, and Tiyaha tribes—the latter of which is located in the centre of the peninsula, far from the militants' base.

Additionally, Wilayat Sinai is directly targeting the economic interests of the population of North and South Sinai, especially of the Bedouin. This is seen in its disruption of smuggling, its airline bombing, and the attacks on and harassment of the MFO. The black market, the tourism sector, and the MFO are main employers of Sinai's population.

## 5.2 Controlling Territory

When referring to Wilayat Sinai's "base of operations", it should be clarified that the group does not control territory in the same way as does IS. However, it does have basic freedom of operation in the northeast corner of the peninsula.<sup>134</sup> Relatively speaking, the area is small and comparatively empty: the group failed in its effort to takeover a populated city, Sheikh Zuweid, in the way IS rolled through Iraq's Anbar Province. However, Wilayat Sinai is consolidating and strengthening its authority over the area in which it operates and constantly attempting to expand that area.<sup>135</sup>

Although Wilayat Sinai's "control" is incomplete, it violently puts down challenges to its authority. This can be seen in its attacks against tribal leaders and the slaughtering of nascent "awakening" militias. The group also propagates a message of governance—including operating security checkpoints and distributing civil services—suggesting the intention to rule if not the current ability.

<sup>130</sup> Z. Gold, "Sinai Tribes: Between the Egyptian State and the Islamic State", *INSS Insight*, 18 May 2015, <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=9533>.

<sup>131</sup> A. Eleiba, "New front in Sinai: Will tribes join the 'war on terrorism'?", *Ahram Online*, 10 May 2015, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/129862.aspx>.

<sup>132</sup> M. Sabry, Twitter, 28 April 2015, <https://twitter.com/mmsabry/status/593125500987506689>.

<sup>133</sup> I. Lee, "Exclusive: ISIS in Sinai held back by Egypt's Bedouins", *CNN*, 12 November 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/10/middleeast/egypt-isis-sinai-bedouins/>.

<sup>134</sup> "Chapter 5: Terrorist Safe Havens (Update to 7120 Report)", in "Country Reports on Terrorism 2014", US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239412.htm>.

<sup>135</sup> Gold, "Sinai Tribes" (2015).

### 5.3 Influx of “Foreign Fighters”

Since autumn 2015, the Egyptian government has expressed a growing concern of the ability of “foreign fighters” to reach Sinai.<sup>136</sup> More specifically, Wilayat Sinai is successfully recruiting Egyptian returnees that previously fought in Syria, Iraq, or other salafi jihadist hotspots. Egyptian sympathisers in the mainland may be traveling to North Sinai as well. In May 2015 IS leader al Baghdadi called on dispersed followers and sympathisers to travel to the nearest province of his so-called Caliphate to join the jihad.<sup>137</sup>

There’s a long history of small populations of foreign salafi jihadists being trained by or fighting with local groups in both North Sinai and Gaza. However, an influx of “foreigners”—and, to Sinai, Egyptians from the Nile Valley are foreign—can tip the balance of IS ideology versus local interests. Indeed, the relative influx of outsiders, who are neither aware of nor care about the local environment, is likely behind the increased attacks on the Sinai population and its interests.

### 5.4 Targeting the International Interests of anti-IS Coalition Members

Detailed above at great length are the many ways in which Wilayat Sinai has carried out the agenda of IS. In its attacks—or at least its propaganda—against the MFO, the gas pipeline to Jordan, a Croatian foreign worker, and a Russian passenger jet, the group has shown itself to be an arm of IS: exacting revenge for operations against its mother group.

When ABM first pledged allegiance to IS, it was unclear if or how the group’s *modus operandi* would change—and, indeed it did so slowly at first. Even if the group’s pledge to IS was primarily a plea for financial support, a growing dependence on IS’ money made it certain that Wilayat Sinai would adapt, even without direction, to ensure that flow of money continued. Additionally, the flow of money came with a flow of IS-linked fighters, who have different ideas about the *modus operandi* of an IS province.

## 6. Egyptian Government Response

The Egyptian military has been operating, to varying degrees, against salafi jihadists in North Sinai since 2011. Beginning with Operation Eagle in summer 2011, Egyptian military offensives in the peninsula followed a clear pattern: massive operations, of varying lengths, in response to significant terrorist attacks or insurgent strikes. In the case of 2011, Operation Eagle was a show of force after salafi jihadists drove a caravan through the North Sinai capital of al Arish and declared an Islamic emirate. That operation included the first deployment of tanks and warplanes in Sinai since their use

<sup>136</sup> Official Page of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, “Press Statement Issued by the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers on 21 September 2015 Regarding the Measures Implemented within the Context of its Comprehensive Plan to Combat Terrorism in Sinai”, Facebook, 21 September 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/MFAEgypt/posts/930573493681264>.

<sup>137</sup> J. Mojon, “ISIS leader in new audio message: ‘Islam was never for a day the religion of peace’”, *Agence France-Presse*, 15 May 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-is-leader-urges-muslims-to-move-to-caliphate-recording-2015-5>.

was limited by the 1978 Camp David Accords. After their duration, successive Egyptian military operations ended with forces redeploying back across the Suez Canal or to static positions outside the main areas of conflict.<sup>138</sup>

Although Wilayat Sinai has carried out an increasing number of attacks west of al Arish and in central Sinai, the armed forces can count as a success that Wilayat Sinai's operational base has not expanded beyond a small triangle of land in the northeast corner of the peninsula. Additionally, successive and sustained military operations have made it more difficult for Wilayat Sinai fighters to organise and operate in large numbers. After Wilayat Sinai's July 2015 operation, in which it laid siege to Sheikh Zuweid, it was almost nine months until the group was able to pull off another mass casualty insurgent attack: killing fifteen police and potentially capturing three others at a checkpoint south of al Arish on 19 March 2016. Even that attack was on a single checkpoint, as opposed to the successful multi-pronged assaults seen across northeast Sinai in the first half of 2015. However, Sinai developments objectively represent a failure for Egyptian policymakers and security forces.

## 6. Civilian Protection

Following the October 2014 Karam al Qawadis attack, the Egyptian government expanded emergency law in North Sinai: going so far as to establish a night-time curfew inside al Arish. The military and police also maintain checkpoints at the entrances to and inside the governorate's cities and at major crossroads. Despite these efforts, the local population is less safe today than it was when that attack took place. The emergency law and other restrictions have not limited militant activity, nor have they protected the civilian population from Wilayat Sinai attacks.

### 6.2 Defeating Militancy

Since August 2011, and especially since renewed efforts in July 2013, the Egyptian military has maintained unprecedented levels of troops and weaponry in North Sinai. Although the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty designated Sinai as effectively a demilitarised zone, the Israeli government has given Cairo approval to do whatever is necessary to defeat their mutual salafi jihadist threat. In 2015 alone, according to numbers collected by the Tahrir Institute, security forces claimed to have killed nearly three thousand suspected terrorists in North Sinai airstrikes, raids, and firefights.<sup>139</sup> As noted above, such operations appear to have affected the salafi jihadist group's ability to conduct large-scale operations. However, despite these military operations, Wilayat Sinai has displayed a continued ability to take casualties and recover—meaning these strikes have had limited enduring impact on the group.

### 6.3 Halting Infiltration and Weapons Smuggling

Similarly, and related, Wilayat Sinai has managed to replenish its ranks and materiel despite a clampdown on the peninsula's entryways. Egypt blamed the 2012 Rafah Massacre on elements from Gaza and began operations to close the tunnels below the border. Two years later, when double the number of soldiers were killed at Karam al

<sup>138</sup> For an in-depth look at Egyptian policy toward Sinai, see Gold, "Security in the Sinai" (2014), pp. 11-5.

<sup>139</sup> 2,918 reportedly killed in North Sinai counter-terrorism operations in 2015, according to data collected by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy and provided to the author.

Qawadis, the government again pointed the finger at the Palestinian enclave and set out to establish a “buffer zone” on the Rafah border.<sup>140</sup> The government displaced large swaths of its own population in an attempt to end its tunnel problem permanently, to no avail. Likewise, Egypt’s police, border guards, army, and navy are not keeping Sinai’s maritime borders and ports of entry secure.

Arguably the situation in the peninsula would be significantly worse were it not for Egyptian government action: free-flowing arms and fighters into Sinai could have resulted in even greater hardship for the local population with Wilayat Sinai enslaving the peninsula’s residents in a manner akin to IS governance. Despite the possibility or even likelihood of such a hypothetical scenario, however, what is clear is that government policies and military actions have not made things better.

## 6.4 An Opportunity to Reverse Course

The changes in nature and structure of Wilayat Sinai, especially the group’s targeting of the local population and of international interests, provide an opening to the Egyptian army and police that has not existed since 2013. Following Morsi’s ouster and the government’s crackdown on his Islamist supporters, many in North Sinai turned against the military for what the population viewed as overly harsh tactics reminiscent of past ministry of interior abuses. Today, civilians continue to be caught between militant attacks and military counter-operations. However, after Wilayat Sinai turned more harshly on the local population, the people of Sinai for the first time need the Egyptian government to protect them from the salafi jihadists.

Further, Wilayat Sinai’s clear and demonstrated threat to international interests in Egypt should provide Cairo with greater support from the international community. Although there are genuine western concerns about human rights abuses and a tightening of the political space in Egypt, the US and European governments are already providing the Egyptian government more leeway out of a mutual interest in countering the internal IS menace.<sup>141</sup>

## 6.5 Potentially Positive Developments

By the end of 2015, the Egyptian government appeared to be proactively addressing the needs of the local North Sinai population—at least rhetorically. President al Sisi installed a new cabinet in September, and one of its first statements spoke to the government’s “Comprehensive Plan to Combat Terrorism in Sinai”.<sup>142</sup> Addressing the needs of the local population featured heavily in Cairo’s program, including providing humanitarian assistance and medical attention and formulating a “precise” compensation plan for “local residents affected by the security campaigns to combat terrorists”. The government also recommended actions the security forces should take in populated areas, including revising operations to protect civilians and refraining from shoot-first responses against “potential threats”.

<sup>140</sup> Z. Gold, “The Egypt-Gaza Buffer Zone: More Harm than Good for Sinai Security”, *INSS Insight*, 20 November 2014, <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=8124>.

<sup>141</sup> J. Kerry, “Remarks with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry”, US Department of State, 9 February 2016, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/252285.htm>.

<sup>142</sup> Official Page of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, “Press Statement Issued by the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers on 21 September 2015” (2015).



On the security front, the Egyptian military launched Operation “The Martyr’s Right” on 7 September 2015. When the armed forces spokesman announced the completion of the operation’s “first phase”, on 22 September, he said the military managed to destroy large numbers of terrorist and criminal hiding spots, weapons, and vehicles.<sup>143</sup>

As in previous operations, during The Martyr’s Right Egypt’s military used airpower and artillery liberally. However, this operation differed from previous ones. The Martyr’s Right was considered the most comprehensive operation against Sinai’s salafi jihadists to date because during its first phase Egypt followed the “clear and hold” strategy of counter-insurgency for the first time. The military cleared territory, followed by security forces moving in to keep militants that fled airstrikes from returning to populated areas.

Equally important, the military spokesman announced that the “second phase” of Operation “The Martyr’s Right” called for extending control over every part of North Sinai’s cities and totally securing state institutions and vital targets. Additionally, in line with government policy, the military would provide healthcare and welfare for the local population.

While The Martyr’s Right proved that Egypt can learn lessons from previous operations, unfortunately this strategy was not sustained. By late fall 2015, Egyptian forces redeployed from “holding” new ground back to static positions—removing security forces from among the population, where they would be better placed to protect the locals from Wilayat Sinai. Additionally, there have been no clear signs of movement despite additional promises of governmental development assistance to Sinai—actions that, if carried out, would address desperate needs of the peninsula’s civilian population.

## 7. Policy Recommendations

The Egyptian government’s recognition that it needs to address the development and economic grievances of and provide security for the local population is a positive first step. The Egyptian military, of course, needs to sustain effective military operations against Wilayat Sinai; but after almost five years it must acknowledge there is no military-only solution to ridding Sinai of a militant threat. More than just paying lip service, the state needs to actually make it safer for the people of Sinai: this includes both protecting them from militants and avoiding harming them during security operations.

The Egyptian government should also concentrate on a counter-narrative campaign in North Sinai. In contrast to the salafi jihadist narrative of governance, authority, and strength, Cairo can point out specific patterns that show Wilayat Sinai is against the local population—many examples are offered in this paper. However, the ways in which Wilayat Sinai has made life worse for locals should be documented in tandem with a real program that addresses North Sinai’s security, developmental, economic, and

<sup>143</sup> Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, “A statement issued by the General Command of the Armed Forces on the end of the first official phase of Operation (The Martyr’s Right)”, Facebook, 22 September 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/724235764374075>; and “Army: Main stage of operation Martyr’s Right ends, second phase to begin”, Egyptian State Information Service, 23 September 2015, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Articles/tmpArticleNews.aspx?ArtID=96498>.



political needs. The population may be ready to turn on Wilayat Sinai, but the Egyptian government must be an effective alternative.

Egypt's anti-Wilayat Sinai narrative could extend to the entire country as well. A vocal majority of Egyptians support the government's self-proclaimed "war on terror", but there is still political opposition to both the government and its actions. In the wake of the Metrojet bombing, if Egypt emphasises the local impact of this attack on Egypt's tourism sector it may be able to galvanise all its citizens—even those that may broadly oppose the government on all other issues—against IS: or at least stem IS recruitment. At the same time, Egypt's international allies and partners are worried about the clear threats against foreign interests in Egypt. Cairo does not care for this international focus on its internal problems, but it can leverage the IS issue to gain international support for its Sinai operations and a broader focus on border security.

Border, port, and maritime security continue to be key priorities for Egypt, and these areas can be strengthened both by military aid but also with partnership and shared intelligence—not just in the Sinai Peninsula but on Egypt's long borders with Libya and Sudan as well. For example, Israel already provides intelligence to Egypt regarding Gaza tunnels.<sup>144</sup> Along with Cyprus and Greece, all of these countries have great concern about weapons smuggling and trafficking in the Eastern Mediterranean: working together, and with other NATO partners, they could better monitor the coastlines of North Sinai and Gaza.

The affiliation of Sinai's militants with IS also enables countries that are focused on the latter to pick up information on the former. Working with France, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, and other partner nations, the Egyptian government could leverage this joint intelligence against Wilayat Sinai's leaders, operatives, communications, and supply-lines.

A most important international policy should be to encourage Egypt to fulfil its stated promises. Many of the points in the government's Comprehensive Plan to Combat Terrorism in Sinai track with longstanding recommendations from the international policy community. The plan remains thin on details, but it acknowledges the need for a counter-insurgency program in Sinai, even if the Egyptian government will not admit it is facing an insurgency there.

The priority now should be working together to solidify Egypt's own stated policy: finding ways for international partners to support Egypt's comprehensive plan and offering honest but constructive criticism when Egyptian actions do not comport to its own stated goals.

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<sup>144</sup> "ISIS operatives in Sinai are receiving medical treatment at Hamas hospitals in Gaza", *The Jerusalem Post*, 8 February 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/ISIS-operatives-in-Sinai-are-receiving-medical-treatment-at-Hamas-hospitals-in-Gaza-444233>.

## Annex

### Major attacks – February 2011-June 2013

- 5 February 2011: First attack on North Sinai gas pipeline network
- 18 August 2011: Cross-border raid from Sinai north of Eilat, Israel
- 5 April 2012: First rocket strike on Eilat, Israel
- 19 July 2012: First targeting of Egyptian soldiers
- 5 August 2012: “Rafah Massacre” – attack on Egyptian border guard base leaves sixteen dead
- 31 August 2012: Beheaded body of alleged “spy” found in Rafah, Cairo
- 14 September 2012: Militants breach North Camp base of Multinational Force and Observers

### Major attacks – July 2013-October 2014

- 4 July 2013: First rocket attack on Israel following ouster of President Morsi
- 7 July 2013: Resumption of gas pipeline attacks
- 19 August 2013: “Second Rafah Massacre—25 Egyptian Central Security Forces recruits killed
- 11 September 2013: Jund al Islam claims double VBIED attack
- 18 November 2013: First ABM-claimed specific attack on Egyptian security forces
- 25 January 2014: MANPADS downs Egyptian military helicopter
- 24 October 2014: VBIED and raid of Karam al Qawadis checkpoint

### Major ABM attacks outside North Sinai – July 2013-October 2014

- 5 September 2013: Attempted VBIED assassination of Egyptian minister of interior
- 7 October 2013: Bombing of South Sinai security directorate
- 19 October 2013: Bombing of Ismailiya security directorate
- 24 December 2013: Bombing of Dakahliya security directorate
- 24 January 2014: Bombing of Cairo security directorate
- 16 February 2014: Suicide-bomber targets South Korean tourists in Taba
- 19 July 2014: Raid of Farafra checkpoint in Western Desert
- 6 August 2014: American William Henderson killed while working in Western Desert

### Major attacks – November 2014-March 2016

- 19 January 2015: Egyptian gas pipeline attacked for first time since IS affiliation
- 29 January 2015: Coordinated attacks on Battalion 101 base and other security sites
- 2 April 2015: Two coordinated VBIED attacks
- 12 April 2015: VBIED attack on police station in al Arish
- 16 May 2015: Judges gunned down in al Arish
- 20 May 2015: Audio statement from Wilayat Sinai justifies attacks on Egypt’s judiciary
- 9 June 2015: First claimed militant attack on North Camp base in history of MFO
- 14 June 2015: First claimed use of a Kornet anti-tank missile targeting an Egyptian tank
- 1 July 2015: Siege of Sheikh Zuweid and other coordinated attacks across northeast Sinai
- 3 July 2015: First rocket strike on Israel since IS affiliation
- 16 July 2015: Anti-tank missile hits coast guard patrol craft in Mediterranean Sea off Rafah
- 3 September 2015: Six MFO troops wounded by two roadside IEDs (unclaimed)

- 24 November 2015: Attack on judges counting parliamentary elections ballots in al Arish
- 14 January 2016: "Battle of Abu Ali al Qaram" – Attacks on Egyptian forces near Israeli border
- 11 February 2016: Rockets fired at al Arish airport during visit of defence, interior ministers
- 20 February 2016: Attack on police station in al Arish kills five security force members
- 21 February 2016: Attack on police with IEDs in Bir al Abd, more than 80km west of al Arish
- 27 February 2016: For first time Wilayat Sinai sets up roving checkpoint inside al Arish
- 13 March 2016: Wilayat Sinai claims first of a string of attacks in central Sinai
- 19 March 2016: Fifteen police killed in attack on Safa checkpoint south of al Arish

#### Major IS attacks outside North Sinai – November 2014-March 2016

- 13 November 2014: Egyptian naval vessel hijacked in Mediterranean (unclaimed, but suspected)
- 28 November 2014: Shootings in Cairo, Qalyubiya during "Islamic Day of Rage" (Wilayat Sinai)
- 11 July 2015: Bombing of Italian consulate in Cairo (Islamic State)
- 15 July 2015: VBIED on Suez-Cairo Road (WS)
- 22 July 2015: Croatian Tomislav Salopek kidnapped west of Cairo; beheaded 12 August (WS)
- 20 August 2015: Bombing of Qalyubiya national security building (IS)
- 13 September 2015: Egyptian convoy attacked in Western Desert, alleged "spy" beheaded (IS)
- 20 September 2015: Bombing of Egyptian foreign ministry branch office (IS)
- 2 October 2015: Assassination of Bedouin police officer in Cairo (WS)
- 31 October 2015: Bombing of Metrojet 9268 from Sharm al Sheikh, 224 killed (WS)
- 31 December 2015: First of several claimed small IED attacks in Giza (IS)
- 7 January 2016: Shots fired at bus of Israeli-Arab tourists at hotel near Giza Pyramids (IS)
- 21 January 2016: At least six police killed raiding booby-trapped building near Giza Pyramids (IS)
- 5 March 2016: IED targets security forces outside Omani cultural centre in Giza (IS)

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# Salafi Jihadist violence in Egypt's North Sinai: From local insurgency to Islamic State province

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