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TERRORISM AND THE RISE OF ISIS IN EGYPT

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

By

Jantzen W. Garnett

December 2015

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Defense and Strategic Studies

Missouri State University, December 2015

Master of Science

Jantzen W. Garnett

ABSTRACT

Using mostly primary source materials this thesis seeks to understand the evolution of and linkages between different terrorist organization that have operated in Egypt and the Sinai, in particular. Of particular interest was the terrorist group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) which later became an Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham [Syria] (ISIS) affiliate known as Wilayat Sinai. The thesis then documents the group's operations and shows how it has evolved over the past five years into one of ISIS' most lethal affiliates. ISIS' expansion into Egypt by incorporating ABM into its global terrorist network has increased the threat posed by ISIS to Egypt. Finally, the thesis looks at the risks posed to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), civilians, and the potential for ISIS to foment sectarian strife in Egypt by targeting Coptic Christians.

KEYWORDS: Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Coptic Christians, Egypt, Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham, multinational force and observers, Sinai, Wilayat Sinai, ABM, ISIS, MFO

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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CHAPTER 1: PEACEFULNESS IS THE RELIGION OF WHOM?

The Revolution

Inspired by the uprising in Tunisia that began in December 2010 and ultimately led to the resignation of Tunisia's long time president and dictator Zine al-Abidine Bin Ali on January 14, 2011, Egyptians staged protests on January 25, 2011. In a fashion not dissimilar from the Tunisian uprising, which was sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, Egyptians poured into the streets to protest against a range of social, political, and economic injustices.¹ Near the top of their long list of grievances were issues of corruption, police brutality, and the ever-present emergency law. Calls for protests in Egypt spread across social media, with the now famous hashtag #Jan25 denoting the day on which the demonstrations were to take place, coinciding with the country's National Police Day.

Tens of thousands joined in the demonstrations on that first day, and by Friday January 28, their number swelled to hundreds of thousands, with violent clashes taking place. The police were withdrawn from the streets and replaced by the military, a curfew was imposed, and internet and telecommunication lines were cut.² On January 29, after dismissing his cabinet, President Hosni Mubarak appointed the director of Egypt's General Intelligence Service, Omar Suleiman, as vice president, a position that had been

¹ Ahmed, Amir. "Thousands protest in Egypt." *CNN*. 26 Jan. 2011
<<http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/01/25/egypt.protests/>>.

² Kirkpatrick, David D. "Mubarak Orders Crackdown, With Revolt Sweeping Egypt." *The New York Times*. 28 Jan. 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/29/world/middleeast/29unrest.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>.

left vacant for nearly 30 years.³ Suleiman, realizing that Mubarak's presidency was quickly unraveling, reached out secretly to CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell, through an intermediary, to ask what the US recommended he do.⁴ Mubarak was scheduled to address the nation in a televised speech on February 1, and the US, through Morell and the intermediary, relayed a message to Suleiman outlining what the US thought Mubarak should say in his televised address. The recommendations that were forwarded to Mubarak suggested that he announce his resignation, effective immediately, and the formation of a transitional council to run the country until elections could be held. Morell was assured that Suleiman had convinced Mubarak to make the remarks, but instead Mubarak stated that he would continue as president until elections were to be held in September. The protests intensified, but Mubarak remained defiant amid calls for his resignation. On the night of February 10, in what was widely expected to be a resignation speech, Mubarak went before the public in a second televised address and refused to step down but did transfer powers to Vice President Suleiman.⁵ The following day, however, Suleiman announced on state television that Mubarak had resigned and that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) was now in control until an interim government could be formed.⁶

³ Witte, Griff. "Egyptian troops let protests proceed as Mubarak names vice president." *The Washington Post*, 29 Jan. 2011 <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/28/AR2011012806404.html?sid=ST2011012806535>>.

⁴ Morell, Michael with Bill Harlow. "The Great War of Our Time." Grand Central Publishing. New York, NY, May 2015. Audio Book, 6:19:57.

⁵ "Hosni Mubarak's Speech." Youtube, posted by "Al Jazeera English," 10 Feb. 2011 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS7RBGvKyyM>>.

⁶ "Suleiman: Mubarak Leaves Office." Youtube, posted by "Al Jazeera English," 11 Feb. 2011 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWnJ6hS7H7k>>.

Jailbreaks and Presidential Pardons

The immediate aftereffects of Egypt's January 25 Revolution, as it has come to be known in Egypt, played a crucial role in the reemergence of *Salafi-Jihadists* in Egypt. In what may have been one of the biggest boons for Islamic terrorism in Egypt was the escape of more than 20,000 detainees during the revolution and the subsequent release of thousands more.⁷ In some cases, prison guards simply abandoned their posts. In others, prisons were attacked in an effort to free family members and carry out looting. Among the thousands who escaped from prison during the revolution was the man who would become Egypt's future and first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi.⁸

Egypt's State of Emergency Law, which had been in effect since 1981, abolished *habeas corpus*, allowing for the indefinite detention of individuals without charge or trial based upon the decision of the Interior Minister. Widespread opposition to the law helped galvanize the protests during the revolution, and in an effort to reform following Mubarak's ouster hundreds of individuals detained under the emergency law were released. Soon after Mubarak's ouster, the Interior Ministry announced on March 12 that 904 criminal detainees and 755 political detainees had been released since February.⁹ In the following months, many more political detainees would likewise be freed. Those who had already been tried and sentenced filed appeals and were quickly retried, resulting in many acquittals and releases. A handful of sentences were suspended for unspecified health reasons and the Islamists released. One such individual who was released by a

⁷ Fahmy Mohamed Fadel, Tim Lister, and Paul Cruickshank. "Militants at large since Arab Spring complicate anti-terrorism efforts." *CNN*. 4 Oct. 2012 <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/04/world/meast/egypt-freed-militants/>>.

⁸ "Egyptians sentenced to death in absentia for espionage, escaping prison speak out." *Mada Masr*. 18 May 2015 <<http://www.madamasr.com/news/egyptians-sentenced-death-absentia-espionage-escaping-prison-speak-out>>.

⁹ "The announcement of the names of political and criminal prisoners released from prison service sector." [in Arabic] Official Page for the [Egyptian] Ministry of Interior. Facebook. 12 Mar. 2011 <https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=184945901549081>.

military court on health grounds was Mohamed Shawqi al-Islambouli, the brother of Khalid al-Islambouli, the assassin of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat. Mohamed Shawqi al-Islambouli was being retried for a death sentence when he was released in February 2012.¹⁰ For those whose cases were already final and could not be appealed, presidential pardons were granted. Many of the most extreme Islamists, including numerous leaders of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group, were acquitted, given medical reprieves, or handed pardons and released.¹¹

Notorious Islamists like Aboud al-Zumar, a former colonel in Egypt's military intelligence and al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's chief strategist in the early years of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad,¹² was one of 60 Islamists pardoned by SCAF on March 10, 2011.¹³ Another 41 Islamists were pardoned on July 30, 2011, including Mohamed Mahmoud Salah al-Aswani, who was serving a life sentence plus 22 years for his alleged involvement in Sadat's assassination and a subsequent prison break in 1988.¹⁴ ¹⁵ Ayman al-Zawahiri's brother, Mohamed, had been sentenced to death by a military court in April 1999¹⁶ and was still waiting for his sentence to be carried out when in 2011 the previous

¹⁰ "Egypt military court releases the brother of Sadat's assassin." *Ahram Online*. 27 Feb. 2012
<<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/35491/Egypt/0/Egypt-military-court-releases-the-brother-of-Sadat.aspx>>.

¹¹ Bahgat, Hossam. "Who let the jihadis out?" *Mada Masr*. 16 Feb. 2014
<<http://www.madamasr.com/sections/politics/who-let-jihadis-out>>.

¹² Wright, Lawrence. "The Looming Tower: al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11." Vintage. New York, NY. 2006. pg. 57.

¹³ Tantawi, Hussein. "Decree of the President of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces number 27/2011." [in Arabic] *Mada Masr*. 10 Mar. 2011
<<http://www.madamasr.com/sites/default/files/pdf.%201.%20scf%20pardon%2010%20march%202011.pdf>>.

¹⁴ Tantawi, Hussein. "Decree of the President of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces number 159/2011." [in Arabic] *Mada Masr*. 30 Jul. 2011
<<http://www.madamasr.com/sites/default/files/pdf.%202.%20scf%20pardon%2030%20july%202011.pdf>>.

¹⁵ Mickolus, Edward F. and Susan L. Simmons. "The 50 Worst Terrorist Attacks." Praeger. Santa Barbara, CA. 2014. pg. 53.

¹⁶ "Black Hole: The Fate of Islamists Rendered to Egypt." Human Rights Watch. 9 May 2005
<<https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/05/09/black-hole/fate-islamists-rendered-egypt>>.

verdict was thrown out and he was acquitted and released.¹⁷ Dozens of other former Islamist leaders, imprisoned for years under Mubarak, were quietly released following the revolution. Although many of the well known Islamists who were released are now aged and unlikely to join directly in militancy, they almost certainly still command a large following. It is not the aged Islamists who pose the biggest threat, however. Rather it is the younger rank and file.

The Egyptian prisons that the Islamists were detained in for several decades acted as incubators for radical jihadists. Years of confinement with the older experienced members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group increased the risk of radicalization of the younger inmates. It is not difficult to imagine that the hundreds of Islamists locked up together likely shared contacts and know-how with one another, much in the same way as happened at the now infamous Camp Bucca detention facility in Iraq, where ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was held by US forces.¹⁸ Of the Islamists held in Egypt's prisons, many had real experience and expertise that could prove useful to a nascent terrorist group or insurgency. Several of those detained in Egypt's prisons had extensive military experience, or were veterans of the Afghan jihad. For example, Mohamed Jamal trained in manufacturing explosives while in Afghanistan, then returned to Egypt in the 1990s and became head of the operational wing of Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Rounded up and imprisoned under Mubarak, Jamal languished in prison until his release in 2011.¹⁹ He is believed to have immediately begun tapping former

¹⁷ Bahgat, Hossam. "Who let the jihadis out?" *Mada Masr*. 16 Feb. 2014
<<http://www.madamasr.com/sections/politics/who-let-jihadis-out>>.

¹⁸ Weiss, Michael and Hassan Hassan. "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror." Regan Arts. New York, NY. Feb. 2015. pg. 66.

¹⁹ Gorman, Siobhan and Matt Bradley. "Militant Link to Libya Attack: US Tracks Egyptian Operative Freed from Prison in Wake of Arab Spring." *The Wall Street Journal*. 1 Oct. 2012
<<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390444549204578020373444418316>>.

fellow inmates to form a terrorist group known as the Mohamed Jamal Network (MJN), with training camps allegedly located in both Libya and Egypt. Although he was rearrested in November 2012, both Jamal and the MJN were sanctioned by the UN for association with al-Qaeda in 2013.²⁰ Suffice it to say, he had the will, expertise, and connections to reinvigorate militancy in Egypt.

Sinai Sanctuary

The Sinai quickly became a key location for militants to organize. It served as the perfect location: it was distant from Egypt's central authority, which had been significantly weakened after the revolution. It neighbors the Islamist's primary enemy — Israel. And the desert and mountain terrain added to its defense and isolation from government authority. Furthermore, Salafism among local Bedouin had long been rooted in the Sinai, and years of neglect by the government disenfranchised the local populace, making it receptive to extremists of all stripes.

Political detainees from the old guard of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group were not the only Islamists who escaped during or were released after the revolution. Following the bombings in South Sinai's resort towns of Taba, Sharm el-Sheikh, and Dahab from 2004-2006, thousands of Sinai Bedouin were rounded up and imprisoned.²¹ Several members of the Egyptian Tawhid Wal Jihad organization, responsible for the south Sinai bombings, also managed to escape. Kamal Alam was

²⁰ "Security Council al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Two Entries to its Sanctions List." UN Security Council Press Release. 21 Oct. 2013 <<http://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc11154.doc.htm>>.

²¹ "Egypt: Mass Arrests and Torture in Sinai." Human Rights Watch. 21 Feb. 2005 <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/02/21/egypt-mass-arrests-and-torture-sinai>>.

among them and later featured prominently among the commanders of ISIS' Wilayat Sinai.

Numerous militant groups sprouted in the Sinai in the months and years following the revolution. Two in particular proved to be the most lethal. These groups were focused on targeting Israel, and the first cross border attack occurred on August 18, 2011. In a series of coordinated attacks, militants from the Sinai crossed the border near the southern port city of Eilat and opened fire on a bus and other vehicles. A roadside bomb detonated near an Israeli military vehicle responding to the scene of the initial attack and a gun battle ensued. The attack left six Israeli civilians and two soldiers dead along with the four militants. Another 30 people were wounded.²² The attack was the largest Israel had witnessed on its territory in years. In the process of hunting down the militants, Israel inadvertently killed five Egyptian border police²³ and then, believing Palestinian militants to be behind the attack, conducted reprisal strikes against the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) in the Gaza Strip.²⁴ For almost three weeks, the true perpetrators were unknown — until a previously unheard of group published its first statement claiming responsibility for the attack. The group called itself Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) [Supporters of Jerusalem].²⁵ ABM would not be heard from again for almost another year.

²² Kershner, Isabel and David D. Kirkpatrick. "Attacks Near Israeli Resort Heighten Tensions With Egypt and Gaza." *The New York Times*. 18 Aug. 2011
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html?_r=0>.

²³ Michael, Maggie and Ian Deitch. "Egypt to withdraw ambassador to Israel over ambush." *Independent*. 22 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/egypt-to-withdraw-ambassador-to-israel-over-ambush-2341011.html>>.

²⁴ Greenberg, Joel. "Attacks kill 8 in southern Israel, drawing counterstrike in Gaza." *The Washington Post*. 18 Aug. 2011 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/gunmen-attack-israeli-bus-near-egypt-border/2011/08/18/gIQAtFf8MJ_story.html>.

²⁵ "First Statement." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. 8 Sept. 2011
<www.forsanhaq.com/showthread.php?t=261121>. [WARNING: Jihadist Forum]

Ten months later on June 18, 2012, Israel was again attacked by militants infiltrating across the border from the Sinai. This time it was by another militant group. At least two militants attacked Israeli civilians as they were arriving to work on the Israeli border fence that was under construction at the time, some 20 miles south of the Gaza Strip. The militants initiated the attack by detonating an IED near one of two vehicles carrying the Israeli laborers and then opened fire on the vehicles. One Israeli civilian was killed in the attack before Israeli border guards arrived and killed the two militants.²⁶ A video surfaced online the following day announcing the founding of the new group named Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC) and claiming responsibility for the attack.²⁷ Notably, the two militants who allegedly carried out the attack were shown posthumously in the video and identified, respectively, as a Saudi from Jeddah and an Egyptian from Marsa Matrouh governorate in Egypt's northwest, near Libya.²⁸ The use of a foreigner and a mainland Egyptian was indeed troubling, suggesting that mainland Egyptians and foreigners were traveling to the Sinai to participate in jihad there. Thereafter, however, concerns of foreign fighters traveling to Sinai in large numbers would prove unwarranted, as Syria and Iraq became the main destination for foreign fighters.

More than 10 months after ABM's first statement claiming the cross border attack into Israel, the group announced that it was responsible for 13 attacks targeting Egypt's natural gas pipeline leading to Israel. A video statement published on July 24, 2012

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

²⁷ "Ibn Taymiyyah Center for Media presents two new statements and a video from the newly announced group Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin Fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis." Jihadology. 19 June 2012 <<http://jihadology.net/2012/06/19/ibn-taymiyyah-center-for-media-presents-two-new-statements-and-a-video-from-the-newly-announced-group-majlis-shura-al-mujahidin-fi-aknaf-bayt-al-maqdis/>>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

showed several of the bombings. Although the pipeline is Egyptian, the overall justification given for the attacks targeting the pipeline was to preserve Egypt's resources for Egypt, since the claim was that the government sold natural gas to Israel below market value.²⁹ These attacks certainly drew the ire of the Egyptian government, which began constructing security walls around exposed pipeline, but did not mobilize any significant military response. Mohamed Morsi, the presidential candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, had just been inaugurated the month before, and was not interested in making enemies with Salafis, many of whom he had relied on for support. After all, Egyptian police were not being targeted in the attacks. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis also continued its attacks against Israel, including firing on an Israeli bus travelling near the border in late July and launching two Grad rockets at Eilat in southern Israel in mid August.³⁰

Morsi faced a more difficult situation on the evening of August 5, 2012, when several militants launched an assault against an Egyptian military checkpoint near Rafah in the Sinai as the soldiers were preparing to break their Ramadan fast. After gunning down 16 soldiers, the militants commandeered two military vehicles and made their way toward the Kerem Shalom border crossing between Israel and Egypt.³¹ One of the vehicles detonated as it approached the border crossing. The second vehicle, an armored personnel carrier (APC), crossed into Israeli territory before being bombed by the Israeli

²⁹ "If you revert (to your sins), we shall revert (to our punishments)." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. 24 Jul. 2012, <<https://archive.org/details/Odna012>>.

³⁰ "Documented Operations Report for the Month of Ramadan 1433 Hijra." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. 25 Aug. 2012 <<https://archive.org/details/2itlaq002>>.

³¹ "Militants In Sinai Attack Border Checkpoint." Stratfor. 6 Aug. 2012 <<https://www.stratfor.com/video/militants-sinai-attack-border-checkpoint-dispatch>>.

Air Force.³² Morsi faced furor at home for the senseless killing of 16 Egyptian soldiers, and political pressure from Israel to secure its side of the border.

The attack, which became known as the “Rafah Massacre” and later as the “First Rafah Massacre” in the Egyptian press, forced the military to act more forcefully. Up until this point, the military had done little to curb the expanding militancy, with the exception of a half-hearted August 2011 military operation, dubbed Operation Eagle, which quickly fizzled. Curiously, no group ever claimed responsibility for the attack, and the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem went so far as to distance itself from it by publishing a statement denying any involvement.³³ The military launched Operation Sinai following the Rafah massacre in an effort to secure areas of North Sinai where militancy was believed to be strongest. This brought the militants into direct conflict with the military to an extent not seen before in the Sinai. Morsi used the incident to oust the military’s top commanders, including Defense Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Army Chief of Staff Sami Hafez Anan, and the chiefs of the Navy, Air Force, and Air Defense branch.³⁴

Despite frequent clashes between Sinai militants and the Egyptian military, there were no public claims of attack against the military. The clashes remained minor and insignificant with the Mujahideen Shura Council and Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis remaining focused on targeting Israel. On September 21, 2012, three ABM members armed with

³² “IDF thwarts terror infiltration from Sinai.” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 5 Aug. 2012 <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/IDF_thwarts_terror_infiltration_Sinai_5-Aug-2012.aspx>.

³³ “Denying Any Connection With the Killing of the Egyptian Soldiers.” [in Arabic] Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin Fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 6 Aug. 2012 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/majlis-shc5abrc481-al-mujc481hdc4abn-fc4ab-aknc481f-bayt-al-maqdis-22denying-any-connection-with-the-killing-of-the-egyptian-soldiers22.pdf>>.

³⁴ Fahim, Kareem. “In Upheaval for Egypt, Morsi Forces Out Military Chiefs.” *The New York Times*. 12 Aug. 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/13/world/middleeast/egyptian-leader-ousts-military-chiefs.html>>.

assault rifles, RPGs, grenades, and wearing suicide vests (SVESTs) conducted an ambush targeting an Israeli patrol along the border.³⁵ The militants killed one Israeli soldier and wounded a second in the attack before the three were killed, one having detonated his SVEST.³⁶ ABM initially claimed the ambush was in retaliation for the assassination of one of its members, Ibrahim Aweidah Bereikat, by Israeli and Egyptian spies. The attack occurred along the Egypt-Israel border, roughly 70 miles south of the Gaza Strip and six miles east of the Sinai village of Khariza, where Bereikat was allegedly assassinated.

The Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem continued its attacks on Israel as well. In retaliation for Israel's Operation Pillar of Defense air campaign in the Gaza Strip, the group stated that its members in Gaza launched five rockets into Israel on November 16.³⁷ The Palestinian militant group the Army of Islam claimed that it had jointly conducted the rocket attack with MSC.³⁸ The Army of Islam had been blamed by the Egyptian government for planning the Alexandria church bombing on January 1, 2011 (See Chapter 4) and had been linked to al-Qaeda, but in 2015 allegedly pledged its allegiance to ISIS.³⁹

ABM claimed another rocket attack into Israel on November 20, 2012 and released a lengthy video, nearly an hour long, in early 2013 giving details of its

³⁵ "Friday's Attack on the Jews: The Battle to Punish Those Who Have Attacked Our Beloved Prophet." Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Jihadology. 22 Sept. 2012 <<http://jihadology.net/2012/09/23/new-statement-from-jamaat-an%E1%B9%A3ar-bayt-al-maqdis-fridays-attack-on-the-jews-the-battle-to-punish-those-who-have-attacked-our-beloved-prophet/>>.

³⁶ "IDF soldier killed, another injured in firefight along Egyptian border." Israel Defense Forces. 21 Sept. 2012 <<http://www.idf.il/1283-17144-EN/Dover.aspx>>.

³⁷ "Shelling the Site Kissufim With Five Rockets," [in Arabic] Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin Fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 16 Nov. 2012, <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/majlis-shc5abrc481-al-mujc481hdc4abn-fc4ab-aknc481f-bayt-al-maqdis-22bombing-the-site-kissufim-with-five-rockets22.pdf>>.

³⁸ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2014." US Department of State: Bureau of Counterterrorism. 19 June 2015 <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239413.htm>>.

³⁹ Winsor, Morgan, "Gaza's Jaish al-Islam ISIS Allegiance? Jihadi Group Statement Proclaims Devotion To The Islamic State." *International Business Times*. 11 Sept. 2015 <<http://www.ibtimes.com/gazas-jaish-al-islam-isis-allegiance-jihadi-group-statement-proclaims-devotion-2092764>>.

September 21, 2012 cross border raid into Israel.⁴⁰ This time, however, the militant group claimed the attack was in response to the online movie “Innocence of Muslims,” which negatively depicted the Prophet Mohamed. The group also claimed in the video that they do not target the Egyptian army, blaming the attacks instead on Israel.⁴¹ ABM clearly was not focusing its attacks internally but almost solely externally on Israel up until August 2013.

The overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi was a significant event that changed the terrorist threat emanating from the Sinai, but two other events that took place shortly afterward worsened the situation and turned the Sinai militancy away from targeting Israel to refocus internally against the Egyptian government. In fact, the day after the Egyptian military ousted president Mohamed Morsi from power on July 3, 2013, ABM again launched rockets into Israel claiming responsibility for the attack on July 5.⁴² It wasn’t until the next two events in August occurred that completely changed the dynamics of the Sinai based terrorism.

In August 2013, the situation changed. Five ABM militants prepared to fire rockets into Israel on August 9 when an airstrike struck the launch site killing four of the militants. The militant group quickly released a statement eulogizing the slain fighters and blaming the airstrike on an Israeli drone operating inside Egypt’s airspace in cooperation with the Egyptian government. The statement harshly criticized the Egyptian military, calling its cooperation with Israel and the killing of its own citizens a betrayal,

⁴⁰ “Firing Rockets on the City of Umm al-Rashrash (Eilat) in Support of our People in Gaza.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 20 Nov. 2012 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22firing-rockets-on-the-city-of-umm-al-rashrc481sh-eilat-in-support-for-our-people-in-gaza22.pdf>>.

⁴¹ “Invasion of Discipline for those Who Sacrilege the beloved Prophet.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. 17 Jan. 2013 <<https://archive.org/details/gazwat-eltadib>>.

⁴² “Firing Two Grad Rockets at the Occupied City of Umm al-Rashrash (Eilat).” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 5 Jul. 2013 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22firing-two-grad-rockets-at-the-occupied-city-of-umm-al-rashrc481sh-eilat22.pdf>>.

and asking rhetorically, “how long will one remain silent on this??”⁴³ MSC released a statement in solidarity with ABM, mourning the deaths of the four militants,⁴⁴ and several hundred people attended the funeral of the four ABM members.⁴⁵

Days later, on August 14, hundreds of civilians were killed when the military raided and forcefully cleared two protest camps of thousands of supporters of former president Mohamed Morsi in Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda squares in Cairo.⁴⁶ To the Salafi-jihadists, the overthrow of Morsi proved that democracy would not work to implement shariah [Islamic law]. The bloody dispersal of civilians on August 14, likewise confirmed the view that the military and police were tools of the corrupt government. These events signaled a turning point for both the Sinai based militancy and extremist anti-government elements in mainland Egypt that opposed the military’s government takeover led by Defense Minister Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.

Two buses were transporting policemen across north Sinai on August 19, 2013 when militants stopped the buses and forced at least 24 policemen, dressed in civilian clothes, off the buses and onto the ground.⁴⁷ Appearing to have bound their hands behind their backs, the militants wasted little time executing them in a brutal act that became

⁴³ “Obituary for Four Mujahidin of Jama’at Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis Following a Targeted Drone Strike by the Zionists.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 9 Aug. 2013, <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22obituary-for-four-mujc481hide4abn-of-jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-following-a-targeted-drone-by-the-zionists22.pdf>>.

⁴⁴ “Regarding the Raid of the Treacherous Jews Upon the Land of the Sinai.” [in Arabic] Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin Fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 10 Aug. 2013 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/majlis-shc5abrc481-al-mujc481hide4abn-fc4ab-aknc481f-bayt-al-maqdis-22about-the-raid-of-the-treacherous-jews-upon-the-land-of-the-sinai22.pdf>>.

⁴⁵ “Scenes from the Solemn Funeral of the Heroes of the Group who were Martyred by the Zionist Bombing in the Land of Sinai.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. 10 Aug. 2013 <https://ia600908.us.archive.org/25/items/maqds/1_1.mp4>.

⁴⁶ “All According to Plan: The Rab’a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt.” Human Rights Watch. 12 Aug. 2014 <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt>>.

⁴⁷ “Country Reports on Terrorism 2013.” US Department of State: Bureau of Counterterrorism. 20 Apr. 2014 <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224823.htm>>.

known as the “Second Rafah Massacre.”⁴⁸ Following the attack, a militant group known as al-Salafiya al-Jihadiya fi Sina [Salafi Jihadism in the Sinai], which had been very vocal against the military over the past year but never claimed any attacks, called for direct attacks against the Egyptian “apostate” army, claiming that it was a duty for all believing Muslims. The statement clearly stated that future attacks would be aimed at the Egyptian military and urged soldiers to abandon the army or face the consequences.⁴⁹

The Fitnah Begins

A speech by Abu Mohamed al-Adnani, a high-ranking official and spokesman for the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), was published on August 30, 2013 focusing primarily on Egypt. In the audio message, entitled “Peacefulness is the Religion of Whom?,” Adnani argued that it is permissible to fight the Egyptian army because of its protection of Coptic Christians and Jews and its transgressions against the Quran and Muslims. Additionally, Adnani explained ISIS’ stance toward the Muslim Brotherhood, calling the latter more evil and cunning than the secularists because of their embrace of democracy and deferment of shariah [Islamic law].⁵⁰

The statement from ISIS was significant, because earlier that spring it became apparent that there were sharp disagreements between al-Qaeda Central (AQC) and its nominally subservient affiliate in Iraq. In April, the Islamic State of Iraq’s (ISI) leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced its merger with Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda affiliate

⁴⁸ Barnett, David. “Over 20 Egyptian Policemen Executed in the Sinai.” *The Long War Journal*. 19 Aug. 2013 <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/over_20_policemen_ex.php>.

⁴⁹ “And Fight Them Until There is No Fitnah.” [in Arabic] al-Salafiya al-Jihadiya. Jihadology. 22 Aug. 2013 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/salafc4abyyah-jihc481dc4abyyah-in-the-sinai-22and-fight-them-until-there-is-no-fitnah22.pdf>>.

⁵⁰ Adnani, Abu Mohamed. “Peacefulness is the Religion of Whom?” Jihadology. 30 Aug. 2013 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5ammad-al-adnc481nc4ab-al-shc481mc4ab-22who-is-the-peaceful-religion22.mp3>>.

in Syria, calling the new group the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). However, the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, Abu Mohamed al-Joulani, was unaware of the unilateral attempt at a merger and undercut Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's claim by publicly announcing his allegiance to AQC's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁵¹ In June, Baghdadi publicly rejected Zawahiri's ruling that Joulani would continue as leader of al-Qaeda operations in Syria and Baghdadi would lead operations only in Iraq. In his June audio statement, Baghdadi defiantly stated he would continue to work for a united Islamic state across the border between Syria and Iraq.⁵² Relations between ISIS on one side and AQC and Jabhat al-Nusra on the other quickly deteriorated.

It was against this background that Adnani's audio statement focusing on Egypt but also briefly touching upon Tunisia and Libya was released at the end of August 2013. It was clear that ISIS was not only vying for jihadist supremacy in Iraq and Syria but had ambitions to influence jihadists across the Arab World, particularly in countries viewed as fertile for recruitment and exploitation. Egypt was among them, and the coming months would witness terrorist attacks there on a scale and frequency not seen since the 1990s.

⁵¹ Stern, Jessica and J.M. Berger. "ISIS: The State of Terror." HarperCollins Publishers. New York, NY. 2015. Audio Book. 1:23:42

⁵² Stern, Jessica and J.M. Berger. "ISIS: The State of Terror." HarperCollins Publishers. New York, NY. 2015. Audio Book. 1:24:45

CHAPTER 2: THIS IS THE PROMISE OF ALLAH

Rapid Growth

On September 5, 2013, smoke filled the sky on an otherwise clear and sunny Thursday morning in the upscale Cairo district of Nasr City as flames engulfed several vehicles and the sound of a massive explosion echoed throughout the neighborhood. Many of the vehicles, now damaged by the blast, were part of the motorcade and security entourage of Egyptian Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim, the target of the assassination attempt. The white armored Nissan Patrol that Ibrahim was traveling in was severely damaged, but the minister himself managed to escape unscathed. The explosion and resulting shrapnel, however, left one person dead and more than 20 others wounded.⁵³

Walid Badr, a member of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), had surveyed the route and the neighborhood where Ibrahim lives in Nasr City in preparation for the attack. On the morning of the attack, Badr parked his Hyundai along the side of the road near the intersection he suspected Ibrahim's motorcade would take as the minister left his home.⁵⁴ When the convoy passed through the intersection, Badr accelerated his car in the direction of the minister's motorcade and detonated the explosives packed in his car. This marked the first attack by ABM outside the Sinai Peninsula.

ABM published a statement claiming responsibility for the assassination attempt on Mohamed Ibrahim and warning him, saying, "what is coming will be more grievous

⁵³ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2013." US Department of State: Bureau of Counterterrorism. Apr 2014 <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224823.htm>>.

⁵⁴ "Targeting the Egyptian Interior Minister." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 26 Oct. 2013 <https://ia801007.us.archive.org/10/items/G_TH_Misr1/gazwat_wazir.mp4>.

and more bitter.”⁵⁵ The statement also served as an introduction of sorts, in which the group addressed several important matters it wanted to clarify to the Egyptian people regarding its ideology and commitment to the Muslim masses. Among the issues discussed were its embrace of jihad to establish Islam, its rejection of democracy, which it described as a form of polytheism, and its dismay at the military’s massacres of Muslims in Rabaa al-Adawiyah and al-Nahdah squares, as well as the military’s bombings of mosques in the Sinai. The group vowed justice against those killing Muslims, specifically naming Defense Minister Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim. It called for Muslims to stay away from all facilities belonging to the Interior or Defense Ministries, and even offered an apology for not succeeding in its assassination attempt to kill Ibrahim.⁵⁶ In subsequent months, the militant group followed through on its threat, launching multiple attacks against the military and government on a scale and frequency not seen since the 1990s.

The rapid growth of ABM and the increased sophistication of its attacks reached such a level that it became apparent that the group had received expert training, particularly in the construction of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). One indicator that the group had acquired specialized expertise was the identification of the suicide bomber that carried out the attempted assassination of Mohamed Ibrahim. The identity of the bomber was not disclosed until the end of October, when ABM published a half-hour long video focusing on the assassination attempt and identifying Walid Badr

⁵⁵ “Assassination Attempt of the Egyptian Interior Minister: Battle of Revenge for the Muslims of Egypt.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 8 Sept. 2013, <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22assassination-attempt-of-the-egyptian-interior-minister-battle-of-revenge-for-the-muslims-of-egypt22.pdf>>.

⁵⁶ “Assassination Attempt of the Egyptian Interior Minister: Battle of Revenge for the Muslims of Egypt.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 8 Sept. 2013 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22assassination-attempt-of-the-egyptian-interior-minister-battle-of-revenge-for-the-muslims-of-egypt22.pdf>>.

as the assailant. Badr was a former Major in the Egyptian Army and a graduate of Egypt's War College (class of 1991). He had also been a recent participant in the jihad in Afghanistan and Syria. Badr's experience from his time in the Egyptian military, as well as from fighting in Afghanistan and Syria,⁵⁷ would have made him an important asset to ABM.

In November, the government also named Hesham Ashmawy and Imad al-Din Ahmed as suspects in the attempted assassination of the Interior Minister.⁵⁸ Like Badr, both Ashmawy and Ahmed were former military officers who since left the military and joined the jihadist ranks. Ahmed was an officer in the Egyptian Border Guard forces, and is believed to be a close associate of Ashmawy. Ashmawy, thought to have been the mastermind of the plot to assassinate Mohamed Ibrahim, joined ABM in August after the Rabaa al-Adawiya massacre. According to Egypt's Interior Ministry, Ashmawy traveled from Cairo to Turkey in April 2013, then crossed into Syria and trained in the manufacturing of explosives for several months before returning to Egypt. Ashmawy is considered among the most dangerous terrorist element in Egypt because of his military training and detailed knowledge of the Egyptian armed forces. He joined the military in the 1990s and in 1996 was selected to join Egypt's elite special forces unit, known as the Thunderbolts. In 2007, Ashmawy was discharged from the military after coming under scrutiny by some colleagues and superiors who witnessed his transformation to an extreme Islamic ideology.⁵⁹ After joining ABM in 2013, Ashmawy and Ahmed are

⁵⁷ "Targeting the Egyptian Interior Minister." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. 26 Oct. 2013 <https://ia801007.us.archive.org/10/items/G_TH_Misr1/gazwat_wazir.mp4>.

⁵⁸ Ismail, Ibrahim, "We publish details of conference of the Interior [Ministry]." [in Arabic] *al-Youm al-Sabah*. 23 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.youm7.com/story/0000/0/0/-/1359941#.VjyyZ9WrS-9>>.

⁵⁹ Bayoumy, Yara. "Insight - In Egypt, ex-military men fire up Islamist insurgency." *Reuters*. 7 Apr. 2015 <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/04/07/uk-egypt-militants-military-insight-idUKKBN0MY1PP20150407>>.

thought to have played a prominent role in training other group members and planning attacks over the following year.⁶⁰

ABM's expertise and lethality was augmented by the return of foreign fighters who had left Egypt to fight in Syria following Egypt's revolution. In early 2014, ABM eulogized several members who were killed during military operations targeting the group. The eulogies acknowledged that three fighters had travelled to Syria for jihad following the revolution before returning to Egypt.^{61 62} These returning jihadists and others were instrumental in ABM's rapid rise to become Egypt's premier terrorist group in 2013.

From IEDs to VBIEDs

Following the assassination attempt on Mohamed Ibrahim, a series of large VBIED and suicide VBIED (SVBIED) attacks were carried out by ABM militants. In a span of five months, beginning with the September 5, 2013 bombing of Ibrahim's motorcade, ABM conducted and claimed a total of seven car bombings targeting government and military installations and personnel, some detonated by remote control and others carried out by suicide bombers. Prior to these bombings, an SVBIED attack targeted the police department in the North Sinai town of Sheikh Zuweid on August 27, 2013; however, it remained unattributed until September 2015, when footage of the

⁶⁰ Nasser, Mohamed. "Surprise..Three separate officers behind the terrorist attacks in Sinai." [in Arabic] *al-Youm al-Sabah*. 6 Feb. 2015 <<http://www.youm7.com/story/2015/2/6/Vjy1QdWrS-->>.

⁶¹ "Obituary of Two Heroes Among the Heroes of Islam." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 2 Jan. 2014 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22obituary-of-two-heroes-among-the-heroes-of-islc481m-abc5ab-arsalc481n-sac4abd-al-shaelb8a5c481t-and-abc5ab-hc481jr-mue1b8a5am.pdf>>.

⁶² "Obituary of the Epic Heroes of 'Arab Sharkas in Qaliyyubiyyah." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. 23 Mar. 2014 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22obituary-of-the-epic-heroes-of-arab-sharkas-in-al-qalc4abyyc5abbc4abyyyah22.pdf>>.

bombing was shown in a video published by ABM's successor, Wilayat Sinai.⁶³ The two years prior to August 2013, ABM's attacks had been limited to IEDs, small arms, and unguided rockets; the advancement from unsophisticated IEDs to large VBIEDs was a marked improvement for the terrorist group's capabilities. The majority of these car bombings took place outside the militant stronghold of North Sinai in various towns throughout the Nile Delta, including two in Cairo. These attacks demonstrated ABM's advanced technical capabilities and expanding reach, but they were by no means the only attacks carried out by the group during the fall of 2013. Multiple IED attacks and gun battles also took place between ABM fighters and Egyptian soldiers in North Sinai, the heart of the growing insurgency.⁶⁴

Choosing Sides

Early on, as the schism between the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and al-Qaeda Central (AQC) became public, ABM walked a fine line, carefully courting both sides throughout the latter half of 2013. ISIS, as the audio speech by spokesman Abu Mohamed al-Adnani on August 30 made clear, it sought influence among Egypt's jihadist circles (See Chapter 1) and ABM was conscious of this from the beginning. At the same time, however, ABM did not want to alienate one side or the other. Moreover, it would have been foolhardy to immediately cast its lot with ISIS and turn its back on the long time global jihadist structure built by al-Qaeda. After all, al-Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, was an Egyptian.

⁶³ "Harvest of the Soldiers." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Jihadology. 1 Sept. 2015
<<http://jihadology.net/2015/09/01/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-harvest-of-the-soldiers-wilayat-sayna/>>.

⁶⁴ "Fight them until there is no more Fitnah." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 28 Sept. 2013
<http://ia601009.us.archive.org/18/items/ansar_maqds_qatlowhom/1.mp4>.

From this early stage, it is likely that many ABM members, including from among its leadership, already had links to ISIS at some level, however loose they may have been. In its October 2013 video showing the attempted assassination of Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim, ABM included excerpts from speeches by both Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Mohamed al-Adnani, as well as by the man universally accepted by jihadists everywhere, Osama Bin Laden.⁶⁵ In a second video published by ABM in November 2013, the group once again delicately balanced the content, including excerpts from Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the deceased former commander of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the precursor organization to ISIS.⁶⁶ This would be the last time ABM ever included speeches, photos, or otherwise referred to Zawahiri in any of its propaganda. Toward the end of 2013 and early 2014, the fighting in Syria intensified, with ISIS and al-Qaeda's official Syrian branch Jabhat al-Nusra coming into direct conflict with one another.⁶⁷ In December, as the feud between ISIS and al-Qaeda devolved into all out war, ABM released yet another video. Included among scenes of militant attacks and ABM fighters in training were excerpts from speeches by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of ISIS then known as Tawhid wal Jihad, and ISIS's current spokesman Adnani.⁶⁸ This marked an early departure from al-Qaeda's sphere of influence, toward that of ISIS.

⁶⁵ "Targeting the Egyptian Interior Minister." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 26 Oct. 2013 <https://ia801007.us.archive.org/10/items/G_TH_Misr1/gazwat_wazir.mp4>.

⁶⁶ "Battle of Revenge for the Muslims of Egypt #2: Targeting the South Sinai Security Directorate." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 9 Nov. 2013 <<http://jihadology.net/2013/11/19/new-video-message-from-jamaat-an%E1%B9%A3ar-bayt-al-maqdis-battle-of-revenge-for-the-muslims-of-egypt-2-targeting-of-the-south-sinai-security-directorate/>>.

⁶⁷ Stern, Jessica and J.M. Berger. "ISIS: The State of Terror." HarperCollins Publishers. New York, NY. 2015. Audio Book, 1:25:28

⁶⁸ "Fight Them Until There Is No More Fitnah #2." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Jihadology. 19 Nov. 2013 <<http://jihadology.net/2013/12/01/new-video-message-from-jamaat-an%E1%B9%A3ar-bayt-al-maqdis-fight-them-until-there-is-no-more-fitnah-2/>>.

Further alignment with ISIS was evident in an audio statement released by ABM in late January 2014. The audio message was delivered by Sheikh Abu Usama al-Masry, a heretofore unknown ABM official. In the statement al-Masry issued a general call to Egyptians to wage jihad. He encouraged those already waging jihad by saying that the “Crusader campaign” has started to be defeated, and called on soldiers to repent and defect from the army. In closing, al-Masry addressed “our mujahideen brothers in al-Sham [Syria] and their head, the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham” encouraging them to stand firm and have patience.⁶⁹ This was ABM’s first publicly voiced affinity with ISIS and the wording carried important subtleties. The statement essentially endorsed ISIS’ claim as head of the mujahideen in Syria, referring to the group with its self-declared name, including both Iraq and al-Sham — a characterization that goes against Zawahiri’s rejection of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s claim to head operations in both countries. ABM was acknowledging ISIS’ supremacy in both countries.

Finally, on February 2, 2014, al-Qaeda Central (AQC) officially disavowed ISIS in a public statement clarifying that al-Qaeda did not accept its formation and does not recognize the group. Furthermore, al-Qaeda absolved itself of any responsibility for actions taken by ISIS and called for an end to the infighting and resolving the conflicts among the mujahideen in Syria.⁷⁰ As for ABM, it continued to include excerpts from current and former ISIS leaders in its videos, while excluding Zawahiri from all future publications.

⁶⁹ Al-Masry, Abu Usama. “Support God and He Will Give you Victory.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 23 Jan. 2014 <<https://ia600808.us.archive.org/11/items/onsro/2.mp3>>.

⁷⁰ “Statement Concerning the Relations of Qaedat al-Jihad with the Group Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham.” [in Arabic] al-Qaeda. Jihadology. 2 Feb. 2014 <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/al-qc481_idah-22on-the-relationship-of-qc481idat-al-jihc481d-and-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-shc481m22.pdf>.

June 29, 2014 corresponded with the first day of Ramadan 1435 in the Islamic al-Hijri calendar, and was the day ISIS announced its Islamic Caliphate and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the Caliph to all Muslims. ISIS spokesman Abu Mohamed al-Adnani made the announcement in an audio message entitled “This is the Promise of Allah” and officially rebranded ISIS as the Islamic State, dropping the geographically restrictive terms Iraq and al-Sham.⁷¹ ABM soon acknowledged the Islamic State as such, suggesting that it may also soon recognize Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as Caliph. In July 2014, during an *Eid al-Fitr* sermon at the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, ABM official Abu Usama al-Masry called on God to “grant victory to our brothers in the Islamic State and open Baghdad and all the country to them as well as the hearts of the people.”⁷² Within a few months’ time, ABM would pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and officially join ISIS amid much controversy and speculation of a split within its ranks. Thereafter, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis would prove to be one of ISIS’ most effective and lethal affiliates.

⁷¹ Al-Adnani, Abu Mohamed. “This is the Promise of Allah.” [in Arabic] ISIS. Jihadology. 29 Jun. 2014 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/shaykh-abc5ab-muelb8a5ammad-al-e28098adnc481nc4ab-al-shc481mc4ab-22this-is-the-promise-of-god22.mp3>>.

⁷² Al-Masry, Abu Usama. “Eid Sermon From Sinai.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. Jul. 2014 <<https://ia802302.us.archive.org/4/items/3ID1435/3ID1435.mp4>>.

CHAPTER 3: ISIS COMES TO EGYPT

Wilayat Sinai originally pledged *baya* [a religious oath of allegiance] to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in November 2014,⁷³ and subsequently reaffirmed its allegiance in a video that was released in May 2015.⁷⁴ Following its original November 2014 pledge, ABM was formally incorporated into the ISIS structure—rebranding itself Wilayat Sinai, in accordance with the Islamic State’s naming conventions, and in the process becoming one of ISIS’ first external affiliates.

The merger raised new questions and concerns about the capabilities of the already-deadly ABM terrorist organization. While the simple name change does not in and of itself indicate increased capabilities, recent operations carried out by Wilayat Sinai suggest the group has received expertise and possibly resources from ISIS. Expanding capabilities coupled with a new willingness to target international peacekeepers and the potential to exacerbate sectarian divides by launching attacks against Egypt’s minority Coptic Christians could have implications beyond the concerns of just the Egyptian government. It is useful, then, to trace the group’s recent evolution as a way of understanding where it came from—and where it is heading.

Even prior to pledging allegiance to ISIS, Wilayat Sinai, then ABM, was already widely considered to be the most dangerous Salafi-jihadist group operating in Egypt. It had a history of attacks, including a string of stand alone vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and suicide-VBIED operations in the latter half of 2013 and

⁷³ “Pledging Baya to the Caliph of the Muslims Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Joining the Islamic State.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 10 Nov. 2014 <<https://ia601403.us.archive.org/32/items/khlafa/khlafa.mp3>>.

⁷⁴ “Bayat of the Defiant from the Land of the Monologues.” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Archive.org. 18 May 2015 <<https://archive.org/details/Bay3atOpah>>.

January 2014 (See Chapters 1 and 2). The group, however, had suffered a number of setbacks by December 2013 and into the early months of 2014; at least 13 key operatives were killed in clashes with Egyptian forces, including three veterans of the Syrian jihad in addition to a co-founder of the group who was killed when an IED inadvertently detonated in a car crash. Eight other members were arrested in early 2014, six of whom were subsequently executed by Egyptian authorities in May 2015.⁷⁵

The lethality and frequency of the group's attacks dropped significantly after March 2014 — but only temporarily. Nevertheless, it did manage to carry out a few terrorist attacks, most notably one near Farafra in Egypt's Western Desert. In July 2014, elements of the group conducted an armed assault against a military post near Farafra, killing 22 soldiers.⁷⁶ The following month, ABM released a video which concluded with photos from the attack and a caption reading "Assault of the Supporters...Coming Soon," an ominous warning of a forthcoming attack, which would have a profound impact on the group.⁷⁷ A number of deadly roadside IED attacks targeting military convoys in North Sinai followed.^{78 79} And, having gradually reconstituted itself after an operational pause, ABM launched its first complex attack combining the tactics of an SVBIED followed by

⁷⁵ Georgy, Michael. "Egypt executes six militants for attack on soldiers." *Reuters*. 17 May 2015 <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/17/us-egypt-executions-idUSKBN0O208X20150517#RjOITZZzOkRiyryZ.97>>.

⁷⁶ Youssef, Adham. "Military reveals investigation findings of al-Farafra attack." *Daily News Egypt*. 23 Jul. 2014 <<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/07/23/military-reveals-investigation-findings-al-farafra-attack/>>.

⁷⁷ "O Soldier." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 19 Aug. 2014 <<https://ia800300.us.archive.org/25/items/JOUNDY/Joundy.mp4>>.

⁷⁸ "Targeting One of the Armored Vehicles of the Apostate Soldiers." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. September 3, 2014 <https://ia902309.us.archive.org/18/items/Ansar_B_ALmaqdes/QateloHom4.mp4>.

⁷⁹ "Targeting One of Mine Detection Vehicles." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 16 Sept. 2014 <https://ia601401.us.archive.org/13/items/Ansar_B_Elmaqdes3/5.mp4>.

a heavily armed assault against the Karam al-Qawades military post in North Sinai on October 24, 2014. At least 28 Egyptian soldiers died in the attack.⁸⁰

ABM's pledge of *baya* to al-Baghdadi followed the attack in an audio statement released on November 9, 2014. A few days later, the group claimed responsibility for the Karam al-Qawades attack, which they dubbed "Assault of the Supporters" linking the previous warning from August to this attack.⁸¹ Significantly, it became the first attack claimed in the name of Wilayat Sinai. The connection between the threat made in August and the group's inaugural attack as Wilayat Sinai in October suggests the group was likely preparing to pledge *baya* to al-Baghdadi since shortly after the Caliphate's declaration. To be sure, the Karam al-Qawades attack was an indicator that capabilities had been renewed but not necessarily enhanced after a several month lull in large-scale operations. Both, the ability to construct large VBIEDs and to conduct armed assaults had been demonstrated by the group previously; only now these tactics were utilized together.

Following the October attack, the militant group increased operations throughout North Sinai culminating in the synchronized and well-coordinated attacks carried out across northern Sinai on January 29, 2015.⁸² These synchronized attacks were the clearest early indicator that Wilayat Sinai had seen its capabilities improve since its pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi.

The January 2015 attacks went well beyond any previous attack carried out by the terrorist group in sophistication and scope. An SVBIED allegedly filled with tons of

⁸⁰ Kirkpatrick, David D. "31 Egyptian Soldiers Are Killed as Militants Attack in Sinai." *The New York Times*. 24 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/25/world/middleeast/militants-kill-at-least-26-egyptian-soldiers-in-sinai-peninsula-attack.html>>.

⁸¹ "Assault of the Supporters." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Archive.org. 14 Nov. 2014 <<https://archive.org/details/welayat.sena.sawla.HD.quality>>.

⁸² Kirkpatrick, David D. "Bomb Attacks at Security Sites in Sinai Kill at Least 26." *The New York Times*. 29 Jan. 2015 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/30/world/middleeast/bombings-of-security-facilities-in-sinai-kill-at-least-26.html>>.

explosives detonated near the military base for the 101st Army Battalion followed in close succession by two additional and simultaneous SVBIED detonations.⁸³ The triple-SVBIED attack took place inside the security corridor of North Sinai's provincial capital, al-Arish. The security corridor in al-Arish's eastern al-Salam district includes government and military installations such as the military base of the 101st Army Battalion, the North Sinai Security Directorate, a Homeland Security building, a military intelligence building, a military hotel and club, a military hospital, and other governmental buildings, many of which were targeted as part of this attack. Wilayat Sinai claimed that immediately following the SVBIED attacks two of its fighters entered the security corridor armed with automatic rifles and suicide vests (SVESTs).⁸⁴

In further coordination with the al-Arish attack, Wilayat Sinai militants concurrently targeted a number of other security positions across North Sinai as the first SVBIED detonated in al-Arish's security corridor. The terrorist group claimed to have launched coordinated and simultaneous armed attacks against security checkpoints south of Sheikh Zuweid in al-Bowaba, Abu Towila, and al-Jura. They also claimed to have launched 60mm mortars at the al-Zohour military camp north of Sheikh Zuweid. Furthermore, simultaneous armed attacks also took place at al-Masoura and Wali Lafi security checkpoints in the vicinity of Rafah as well as attacks targeting gas pipeline inspection stations south and southeast of al-Arish with light and heavy weapons, including RPGs. A total of nine separate locations were attacked across North Sinai. The exact death toll from the attacks is unknown due to a moratorium imposed on the Health Ministry by the government shortly after the attacks occurred. Wilayat Sinai itself

⁸³ "Chain of Operations: We Swear to Take Revenge." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Nasher.me. 30 Jan. 2015 <<http://www.nasher.me/bayan-2/>>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

claimed the attack left “hundreds” dead.⁸⁵ Some residents of al-Arish estimated the death toll to be nearly 100.⁸⁶ Most media reports putting the number at no less than 30 dead with dozens of others wounded. The lack of transparency, and an unwillingness of the Egyptian government to release official figures, suggests that the attack may have been more devastating than the government wants to acknowledge.

Prior to the January synchronized attacks, there had been little or no evidence that Wilayat Sinai had obtained technical assistance or advanced weaponry from ISIS. The sort of complex attack carried out by the group in late January 2015, however, indicated improved logistical support, an increase in funds, technical assistance in constructing explosives, and additional recruits. Launching attacks against at least nine separate locations across North Sinai suggests this required the involvement of a significant number of militants, for logistics, conducting surveillance, constructing VBIEDs, and assaulting the targets. According to the terrorists’ own account, nearly 100 mujahideen participated in the operation.⁸⁷ The monetary cost associated with the operation including the weapons, ammunition, vehicles, explosives, and construction materials would have been far more than any other operation conducted by the group. The attacks would have required detailed planning and precise execution. The claim that the SVBIED explosions were followed by two suicide gunmen with SVESTs is an indicator of continuing success at recruitment. Typically, groups are more inclined to send members on suicide missions when they have the ability to continually replenish their ranks with new recruits; this

⁸⁵ “Chain of Operations: We Swear to Take Revenge.” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Nasher.me. 30 Jan. 2015 <<http://www.nasher.me/bayan-2/>>.

⁸⁶ Zaki, Menna. “‘State of Sinai’ claim hundreds of killings in Sinai attacks.” *Daily News Egypt*. 31 Jan. 2015 <<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2015/01/31/state-sinai-claim-hundreds-killings-sinai-attacks/>>.

⁸⁷ “Chain of Operations: We Swear to Take Revenge.” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Nasher.me. 30 Jan. 2015 <<http://www.nasher.me/bayan-2/>>.

attack included five suicide militants. It represented the largest, most sophisticated attack conducted by the group to date—and was the earliest indicator that Wilayat Sinai received support from ISIS, perhaps significantly so.

The SVBIED attacks employed by Wilayat Sinai have proved effective and deadly; however, large-scale armed assaults are just as concerning. During the attack at the Karam al-Qawades military post in October 2014, the militants managed to seize large quantities of weaponry, which enhanced its future operations. In April 2015, another armed assault, with the interminable title “Assault of the Supporters 2: Invasion of ‘Evil Will be the Morning for those Who Were Warned,’” Wilayat Sinai militants attacked seven military checkpoints along the main highway in North Sinai linking the cities of al-Arish and Rafah.⁸⁸ The seemingly well-coordinated assaults utilized an attack plan to include support personnel to cut off military reinforcements enabling them to seize two armored vehicles and large caches of military equipment. Furthering the complexity of the attack, the militants, who are known to possess at least two man-portable air-defense system (MANPADS), claimed that their “air-defense unit” damaged an Apache helicopter during the attack.⁸⁹ The assault left at least 16 soldiers dead and the militants seized weapon caches from several of the checkpoints.^{90 91} As for the wounded militants, a previously stolen ambulance was on hand and used as a field hospital to treat

⁸⁸ “Assault of the Supporters 2: Invasion of ‘Evil Will Be the Morning for Those Who Were Warned.’” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Jihadology. 12 May 2015 <https://videos.files.wordpress.com/ojKjXgXO/the-islamic-state-22charge-of-the-supporters-2-wilc481yat-sc4abnc481-sinai22_dvd.mp4>.

⁸⁹ “Statement: Invasion of ‘Evil Will be the Morning for Those Who Were Warned.’” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Archive.org. 3 Apr. 2015 <https://ia800300.us.archive.org/18/items/bian_saa_Sba7/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Samir, Mohamed. [in Arabic] Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces. Facebook. 2 Apr. 2015 <<https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/637908223006830>>.

⁹¹ Samir, Mohamed. [in Arabic] Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces. Facebook. 4 Apr. 2015 <<https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/638957889568530>>.

the mujahideen injured in combat.⁹² The advanced planning and training that is required to conduct such an attack highlights the increased capabilities of the group.

The sophistication of Wilayat Sinai's attacks only continued to increase as it added new advanced weapons to its arsenal throughout the summer of 2015. Since the revolution broke out against Muammar Gaddafi in neighboring Libya in March 2011 the country has been awash in weapons of all kinds. Many of those weapons have made their way across the nearly 700 mile long porous border into Egypt over the past several years and into the hands of the Sinai militants. Of greatest concern are MANPADS and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs). ABM was known to possess a MANPADS as early as January 2014 when the group shot down an Apache helicopter in North Sinai killing all five Egyptian soldiers onboard⁹³ and distributing a video of the attack online.⁹⁴ Although that attack was the only confirmed shoot down of any aircraft in North Sinai, the group has claimed the use of MANPADS on multiple other occasions.

At the beginning of summer 2015, two new weapons systems not previously known to be possessed by Wilayat Sinai appeared on the battlefield. Illustrating its growing arsenal, on June 13, Wilayat Sinai published a photo showing what appeared to be a Soviet-made SPG-9 recoilless rifle system, in essence an unguided anti-tank weapon.⁹⁵ Even more concerning was a statement issued by the militant group the

⁹² "Evil Will Be The Morning For Those Who Were Warned." Photo Report. [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Dump.to. 3 Apr. 2015 <<https://dump.to/aRC>>.

⁹³ Kirkpatrick, David D. "Militants Down Egyptian Helicopter, Killing 5 Soldiers." *The New York Times*. 26 Jan. 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/27/world/middleeast/militants-down-egyptian-helicopter-killing-5-soldiers.html?_r=1>.

⁹⁴ "Fight Them Until There Is No More Fitnah #3." [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 26 Jan. 2014 <<https://ia800303.us.archive.org/11/items/qattel3/qatl3.mp4>>.

⁹⁵ "Lie in Wait for Them at Every Place of Ambush." Photo Report. [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. 13 Jun. 2015 <<http://www.sfha.li/sh35/>>.

following day claiming the use of a Kornet anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) to destroy an Egyptian army M60 tank.⁹⁶

The success of the militants leading into the summer emboldened them to conduct several significant attacks in North Sinai. One such attack came on the evening of June 9, when Wilayat Sinai launched a rocket and mortar attack against the international peacekeepers' base in North Sinai.⁹⁷ Even though the attack didn't result in any casualties, it was the first time the group had targeted the peacekeepers specifically and publicly claimed responsibility for the attack (See Chapter 5). The most significant attack Wilayat Sinai had ever conducted began in the early morning hours of July 1 with a wave of simultaneous attacks in North Sinai, centered around the town of Sheikh Zuweid. The scope of the attack was unprecedented in Egypt's modern history, lasting more than 10 hours.⁹⁸ Two SVBIEDs initiated the barrage of attacks targeting up to 21 different Egyptian security installations across the northeast corner of the Sinai in an apparent effort to seize full control of Sheikh Zuweid.⁹⁹ Several military positions were overrun by the militants while others were besieged until the militants were forced to withdraw after F-16 fighter aircraft were called in. The exact death toll remains unknown with conflicting reports emanating from the military, the militants, and the media.

⁹⁶ Rahl al-Gharib (GAREB1033). [in Arabic] "Targeting an M60 tank with a Kornet type guided missile, and this was at the Karam al-Qawades checkpoint, all praise and gratitude be to Allah." June 14, 2015, 1:55pm Tweet.

⁹⁷ Garnett, Jantzen and Harleen Gambhir. "ISIS's Wilayat Sinai Attacks International Base." Institute for the Study of War. 13 Jun. 2015 <<http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/isis%E2%80%99s-wilayat-sinai-attacks-international-base>>.

⁹⁸ Awad, Mokhtar, Jantzen Garnett, Samuel Tadros, and Lee Smith. "The Future of Egypt: A Somalia on the Nile or a Stable, Robust US Ally in the Region?" Panel Discussion. The Hudson Institute. 17 Jul. 2015 <<http://www.hudson.org/events/1268-the-future-of-egypt-a-somalia-on-the-nile-or-a-stable-robust-u-s-ally-in-the-region-72015>>.

⁹⁹ "Details of the Invasion of Sheikh Abu Suhaib al-Ansari." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Jihadology. 3 Jul. 2015 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/the-islamic-state-22the-raid-of-shaykh-abc5ab-e1b9a3uhayb-al-ane1b9a3c481rc4ab-wilc481yat-saync48122.pdf>>.

Wilayat Sinai militants employed the use of MANPADS to deter approaching military Apache helicopters resulting, according to the militants, in damage to two helicopters. At least one ATGM was also used to target a military M60 tank during the fray.¹⁰⁰ Despite the failure to seize and hold urban terrain, Wilayat Sinai's attempt to do so illustrates a desire that mimic the governance structure of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The emergence of ATGM systems to Egypt and the expert use of the advanced weapons further indicate support of Wilayat Sinai by ISIS. In the weeks immediately following the July 1 assaults additional ATGMs were used to destroy M60 tanks and one even targeting an Egyptian naval vessel in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Rafah in North Sinai.¹⁰¹

Another sophisticated weapon that has allegedly made its way into the hands of Wilayat Sinai militants is powerful IED known as an explosively formed penetrator (EFP).¹⁰² EFPs are shaped charges that are designed to penetrate armor and are much more effective than a typical IED. EFPs were used extensively against US forces during deployment in Iraq in the late 2000s to devastating effect. Wilayat Sinai claimed the use of two EFPs targeting Egyptian military vehicles in North Sinai in August and September 2015.

As previously mentioned, Wilayat Sinai has incrementally adopted many of ISIS' operational methods and it stands to reason that it may also, over time, adopt ISIS'

¹⁰⁰ "Details of the Invasion of Sheikh Abu Suhaib al-Ansari." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Jihadology. 3 Jul. 2015 <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/the-islamic-state-22the-raid-of-shaykh-abc5ab-e1b9a3uhayb-al-ane1b9a3c481rc4ab-wilc481yat-saync48122.pdf>>.

¹⁰¹ El-Ghobashy, Tamer. "Islamic State Affiliate Says It Destroyed Egyptian Navy Ship." *The Wall Street Journal*. 16 Jul. 2015 <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-affiliate-claims-it-destroyed-egyptian-navy-ship-1437070692>>.

¹⁰² Al-Gharib (GAREB1030). [in Arabic] "Detonation of a directed explosive (EFP) on a hummer of the apostate army on the Sheikh Zuweid - Rafah International Road between the checkpoints of Sadot and Wali Lafi resulting in the injury and killing of those inside." August 26, 2015, 3:39am Tweet.

unrelenting efforts to target civilian “apostate” Muslims, non-Muslim minorities, and foreigners. The pace with which it began implementing ISIS’ methods increased steadily after pledging allegiance but even prior to rebranding itself as Wilayat Sinai, ABM began adopting some of ISIS’ tactics.

In August 2014, the group adopted a campaign of beheadings and executions carried out in much of the same manner as that of ISIS, filming and disseminating the videos on jihadi forums and Twitter. The first video surfaced in August 2014 showing the beheading of four civilians accused of cooperating with Israel’s Mossad.¹⁰³ The manner in which they were killed mimicked the high profile beheadings carried out by ISIS of American and British hostages. A second video published by the terrorist group surfaced in early October showing three civilians beheaded and another executed, all accused of cooperating with Israeli or Egyptian security forces.¹⁰⁴

In early 2015, the Sinai witnessed a significant increase in the number of summary executions and beheadings. Eight bodies were found beheaded and strewn along North Sinai roadways with dozens of others found shot in apparent execution-style killings. Many local residents blamed Wilayat Sinai for the beheadings, which proved accurate; on February 9th, the group released a gruesome video of the eight beheadings, which were carried out in broad daylight along the side of the al-Arish-Rafah highway.¹⁰⁵ Although the majority of the execution-style killings have not been publicly claimed they too are presumed to be the work of Wilayat Sinai militants.

¹⁰³ “They are the Enemy, so Beware of Them.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 28 Aug. 2014 <<https://archive.org/details/Hom3dw>>.

¹⁰⁴ “They are the Enemy, so Beware of Them #2.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 5 Oct. 2014 <https://ia601401.us.archive.org/31/items/hom_al3do_fa7thrhom2/Hom_Al3ado2.mp4>

¹⁰⁵ “Crimes of the Alliance of the Jews and the Apostate Army Against our People in the Sinai 4.” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Archive.org. 9 Feb. 2015 <<https://archive.org/details/TAWTHEEQ4>>.

These tactics are designed to intimidate the local population so as to discourage would-be informants from working with the security forces. Another tactic utilized by the terrorist group, albeit to a lesser extent, is home demolitions. The homes are destroyed by rigging them with explosives, a tactic sometimes referred to as house-borne improvised explosive devices or HBIEDs. In a video released in October 2014, armed militants are shown searching a house late at night for a man accused of cooperating with the Egyptian security forces. Not finding him at home they clear the house of his wife and young children then set explosives to demolish the house. As the militants are shown clearing the house, an excerpt from a speech by ISIS spokesman Abu Mohamed al-Adnani is heard in which he advises “remove their families from their homes and then blow up their homes.”¹⁰⁶

A second instance when Wilayat Sinai employed the use of an HBIED to target the home of a civilian was in late April 2015 when a feud broke out between the militant group and the local Bedouin tribe Tarabin. It’s unclear exactly what led to the hostilities, but it began almost immediately after Wilayat Sinai militants distributed leaflets warning Tarabin tribal members not to support the Egyptian army.¹⁰⁷ On April 29, Wilayat Sinai claimed to have blown up the home of Ibrahim al-Arjani,¹⁰⁸ a wealthy influential member of the Tarabin tribe and owner of the natural resource exploitation company Misr Sinai. Arjani is close to President Sisi and the government has contracted with his company for work; for these reasons Wilayat Sinai considers him an apostate.

¹⁰⁶ “They are the Enemy, so Beware of Them #2.” [in Arabic] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Archive.org. 5 Oct. 2014 <https://ia601401.us.archive.org/31/items/hom_al3do_fa7thrhom2/Hom_Al3ado2.mp4>.

¹⁰⁷ Sinai Media Office (SDKHX14). [in Arabic] “Distributing cautionary statement to the Tarabin tribe not to deal with the apostate Egyptian army.” April 25, 2015, 5:59pm. Tweet.

¹⁰⁸ “Rigging and blowing up the house of the Apostate Ibrahim al-Arjani, one of the clients of the Apostate Army.” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. JustPast.it. 29 Apr. 2015 <<http://justpaste.it/s3rj>>.

These two incidents were the only times civilian homes were targeted with HBIEDs and claimed publicly by the group. Occasionally through Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 homes of policemen in North Sinai would be damaged or destroyed by IEDs but it was rare and no claims of responsibility ever emerged. In June 2015, that changed and what appeared to be a campaign to target the homes of mid-level policemen with HBIEDs in the city of al-Arish commenced. Between June and July, a dozen homes—all belonging to policemen—were damaged or destroyed by HBIEDs with Wilayat Sinai publicly claiming responsibility.^{109 110} Several other homes were also destroyed by HBIEDs, also in al-Arish, but were left unclaimed. Most of the homes were empty at the time they were attacked. In the case of the later attacks they were empty because policemen were removed from their homes because the attacks were becoming a major concern. That does not matter however; the purpose of these attacks is to cause panic and fear, to intimidate. This tactic, along with beheadings and executions, bears a strong resemblance to the intimidation campaign undertaken by ISIS in Mosul prior to its seizure of the city and the declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014.¹¹¹

Beyond the intimidation campaign, a number of indicators have emerged suggesting Wilayat Sinai's growing association with ISIS in more than just in name and rhetoric. Wilayat Sinai has made efforts to at least appear to distribute money to locals in need, as evidenced by a photo set published by their media office.¹¹² The photos allegedly depict mujahideen distributing funds to residents whose homes were destroyed by the

¹⁰⁹ "Harvest of the Military Operations for the Month of Ramadan." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Archive.org. 22 Jul. 2015 <<https://ia601303.us.archive.org/26/items/7sadramdan/AR.pdf>>.

¹¹⁰ "Harvest of the Military Operations for the Month of Shawal." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Archive.org. 19 Aug. 2015. <<https://archive.org/details/7sadShawal>>.

¹¹¹ Weiss, Michael and Hassan Hassan. "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror," Regan Arts, New York, NY. February 2015. pg. 76.

¹¹² "Photo report on the the distribution of funds to Muslims affected by the demolitions and burnings of their homes by the apostate army." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Justpaste.it. 8 Jan. 2015 <<http://justpaste.it/isxw>>.

military. The alleged funds were distributed in clearly marked Air Mail envelopes with “Islamic State, Wilayat Sinai” written prominently across the front. The distribution of “Islamic State” aid money is, like the fear tactics of executions and beheadings, a hallmark of ISIS social outreach efforts in its Iraqi and Syrian territories. In additional efforts, armed and masked militants were photographed handing out treats to the children of local Sinai residents and photos of militants distributing food aid to the local population were also distributed online.¹¹³

Furthermore, Wilayat Sinai has on occasion enforced, at least to a limited extent, its own interpretation of sharia (Islamic law) by confiscating and burning marijuana and cigarettes during traffic stops at mujahideen checkpoints in North Sinai. In January 2015, photos of militants stopping vehicles, confiscating marijuana, and then burning it along the side of the road were published by Wilayat Sinai’s media office.¹¹⁴ In other subsequent releases, militants are showing burning car and truckloads of cigarettes.¹¹⁵ These types of events double as, or perhaps are purely, public relations stunts that work to enhance the group's image through its media campaigns. Since joining ISIS, the media campaign has dramatically increased to include numerous new videos, photos, and statements including a new monthly operations report detailing military operations carried out by the group.

For all of its counterterrorism efforts to date, it is likely that the Egyptian government has unwittingly assisted Wilayat Sinai’s recruitment efforts. Within days of the October 2014 attack against the Karam al-Qawadis military post, the government

¹¹³ “And Do Good.” Photo Set. [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Sfha.li. 27 May 2015 <<http://www.sfha.li/sh3b2/>>.

¹¹⁴ “Photo report on the burning of marijuana seized during stops at checkpoints.” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Justpaste.it. 3 Jan. 2015 <<http://justpaste.it/iq4c>>.

¹¹⁵ “And Forbid What is Wrong,” Photo Report, [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai, Justpaste.it, August 2, 2015, <<http://justpaste.it/mqug>>.

responded by implementing a plan to establish a 500 meter (0.3 mile) wide, 13.5 kilometer (8.4 mile) long buffer zone along Sinai's border with the Gaza Strip. The plan called for the eviction of 1,156 families and the demolition of 802 homes.¹¹⁶ On January 8, 2015 the military began implementing phase two of the buffer zone which doubled the initial 500 meter wide zone to a full kilometer and required the evacuation of an additional 2,044 families and demolition of another 1,220 homes.¹¹⁷ A third phase, expanding the zone an additional kilometer, was announced in April and a survey of the area released in August stating that an additional 1,215 homes and 40 government facilities would be removed.¹¹⁸ The buffer zone is intended to stop the flow of weapons and fighters coming from the Gaza Strip through hundreds of tunnels under the border. In all likelihood, however, the forced evictions, loss of homes, jobs, and major sources of income (i.e., the smuggling of licit and illicit goods into Gaza) for the local population has helped Wilayat Sinai in its recruitment efforts to expand its membership.

So far, it is unclear how many new recruits the group has garnered as a result. But there is mounting evidence that the displacement caused by the Egyptian security measures has the potential to be a boon for the organization; to wit, a recent photo report published in late May depicts some 3 dozen camouflage-clad militants marching and training in what is alleged to be a new group of recruits for the terrorist organization.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Abu Daraa, Ahmed and Khalid Mohamed. "North Sinai Governor: Evacuation of the Border Strip is Final and Not Temporary..and We Will Pay Compensation." [in Arabic] *al-Masry al-Youm*, October 28, 2014 <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/557510>>

¹¹⁷ "Egypt starts demolition of homes for phase 2 of Rafah-Gaza buffer zone." Ahram Online, January 9, 2015, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/119863/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-starts-demolition-of-homes-for-phase--of-Raf.aspx>

¹¹⁸ Mohamed, Khalid. "The Completion of the Inventory of the Third Stage of the Border Area in Preparation for Evacuation." [in Arabic] *al-Masry al-Youm*, August 8, 2015, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/790989>

¹¹⁹ "And Prepare Them." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai, Sfha.li, May 31, 2015, <http://www.sfha.li/sha3b3/>

There are no signs that Wilayat Sinai has been impeded by increased security operations to target it. Following the July 1st North Sinai attacks, the military launched large-scale operations to target the group but was met with an expanding use of advanced anti-tank guided missiles by the insurgents. Two months later, in early September, the military launched a new operation dubbed “Martyr’s Right” after six soldiers from the North Sinai based Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) were wounded by two IEDs.¹²⁰ Wilayat Sinai responded to this latest operation with its own operation it called “Hunting the Apostates” which included numerous attacks including two SVBIED attacks targeting military convoys in Rafah on two consecutive days on September 11 and 12.¹²¹

Indeed, there are some indicators, as mentioned above, that suggest Wilayat Sinai’s operations will only increase in frequency, lethality, sophistication, and complexity with an expanding target set to include Coptic Christians, international peacekeepers, and potentially other foreign interests. Wilayat Sinai appears to have received technical assistance, training, advanced weapons, and limited funds from ISIS, and is seizing munitions and likely gaining recruits; all of which adds to their capabilities. These new capabilities are certain to increase the frequency of large, complex attacks similar to the July 1 attack in North Sinai. With their recent successes, Wilayat Sinai militants are certain to be emboldened to aim for larger targets. The combination of battle-hardened militants awash with recently acquired heavy weapons, emboldened by

¹²⁰ Samir, Mohamed, [in Arabic] Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, Facebook, September 7, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/videos/716368441827474/>

¹²¹ “Harvest of the Military Operations for the Month of Dhu al-Qida” [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai, Archive.org, September 18, 2015, https://ia601303.us.archive.org/1/items/7sad_11_sinai/ara.pdf

battlefield successes creates a lethal situation which risks broadening the Sinai insurgency.

CHAPTER 4: THE TALE OF TWO WOMEN

Weakness Breeds Chaos

ISIS thrives in areas of weak central control. In Iraq, it played the opposing Muslim sects, Shias and Sunnis, against each other in order to drive Sunnis to its side, swell its ranks, and weaken the authority of the central government by turning the Sunni population against the predominantly Shia government. In Syria, ISIS opposed any form of Sunni militancy that did not conform to its own extreme views and unrelenting violence leading to fierce clashes between ISIS and the al-Qaeda group Jabhat al-Nusra. This was to eliminate any competitors or alternatives to the extreme ideology of ISIS. As violent as this may have been in Iraq and Syria it served the purpose effectively and has been spread to other countries where ISIS is expanding. In Libya ISIS has fought al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Sharia hoping to leave itself as the sole major Salafi-jihadist organization in Libya. In Saudi Arabia and Yemen, where there are significant populations of differing sectarian affiliations, ISIS has attempted to polarize the sectarian divides by targeting Shia mosques in both countries.

Although Egypt has a negligible Shia population, Egypt is home to the largest Christian population in the Middle East. There is no official number of Christians living in Egypt but Christians are estimated to make up between 5-10% of the population, putting the figure at 4.5 to 9 million Christians.¹²² Sectarian tensions between Egypt's Coptic Christians and Muslims have long existed and have occasionally turn violent but typically it is restricted to isolated incidents. There exists, however, the potential for ISIS

¹²² Hackett, Conrad. "How many Christians are there in Egypt?" Pew Research Center, February 16, 2011, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2011/02/16/how-many-christians-are-there-in-egypt/>

to seize on these tensions to invoke widespread sectarian violence much in the same way as they have done between Shia and Sunni Muslims in Iraq and seek to do in Saudi Arabia.

ISIS and its former incarnations have incited sectarian strife in Egypt in the past and have specifically called for the targeting of Egypt's Coptic Christians. Over the years, ISIS has seized upon one event in particular that it hopes could ignite violence against the Copts and lead to dangerous and widespread sectarian chaos throughout Egypt.

Christian or Muslim?

Situated on the east bank of the Nile River nearly 200 miles south of Cairo lie the ruins of the ancient Egyptian city of Akhetaten, which served as the capital of the Eighteenth Dynasty for a brief stint during the later half of the 14th century B.C. The curious, if short-lived, capital city of Akhetaten was built by Pharaoh Amenhotep IV during the fifth year of his reign after changing his name to Akhenaten and seeking to establish monotheism in Egypt centered around the sun-disk deity Aten.¹²³ The city was abandoned shortly after Akhenaten's death when his son, King Tutankhamun, moved the capital once again to Thebes and reverted the kingdom back to polytheistic worship, thus ending ancient Egypt's short experiment with monotheism.¹²⁴ What's left of the ancient capital and the temples erected for the worship of Aten overlook the Nile River opposite from the modern day town of Deir Mawas. It was in Deir Mawas that a single event

¹²³ "Tell el-Amarna (ancient Akhetaten, Egypt)," The British Museum, http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/t/tell_el-amarna_ancient_akheta.aspx

¹²⁴ "Tutankhamun (Tutankhaten)," Ancient Egypt Online, 2010, <http://www.ancientegyptonline.co.uk/tutankhamun.html>

ignited widespread sectarian strife between Coptic Christians and Muslims throughout Egypt and caught the ire of the Islamic State of Iraq, known as al-Qaeda in Iraq, as well as al-Qaeda's core leadership.

On the night of July 18, 2010, Camilia Shehata, the wife of the Coptic priest Tedaos Samaan of the Saint George monastery in Deir Mawas, vanished, just days before her 25th birthday. News of her disappearance spread and speculation proliferated among Coptic villagers that Camilia had been kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam. Whether the accusation of Camilia's abduction and forced conversion was started by her husband or by other Coptic Church members is unclear, but Samaan joined in protests demanding her return. Over the next few days, demonstrations took place in Deir Mawas and Cairo by Copts demanding that state security find and return Camilia to her family. The demonstrations peaked on July 22 when hundreds of Coptic protesters staged a sit-in at Saint Mark's Cathedral, the seat of the Coptic Pope, in Cairo's Abbasiya district.¹²⁵

Demonstrators outside Saint Mark's Cathedral cheered upon hearing the news on July 24 that Egyptian security forces had found and returned Camilia to her family.¹²⁶ Bishop Jeremiah, the secretary of then-Pope Shenouda III, made the announcement in a television broadcast for the Coptic satellite station Agape, which is the official mouthpiece of the Coptic Church. He thanked the Interior Ministry for responding to the Copts' requests and aggressively searching to find and return Camilia. He noted that Camilia had left her home on her own volition due to family issues and that it had

¹²⁵ Nafie, Saied. [in Arabic] "Copts Stage a Protest Inside the Abbasiya Cathedral After the Disappearance of the Wife of a Priest of Deir Mawas," *al-Masry al-Youm*, July 22, 2010, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/12149>

¹²⁶ Al-Mazahem, Gamal Girgis. [in Arabic] "Coptic Demonstrators Leave the Cathedral After the Return of the Wife of a Priest in Minya," *al-Youm al-Sabah*, July 24, 2010, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2010/7/24/VkAEbdWrS-->

nothing to do with religion.¹²⁷ Although Camilia's return put an end to Coptic demonstrations a new narrative of the events quickly emerged among Muslims further risking a plunge into sectarian strife.

The preceding days' events were reminiscent of the case of another woman, Wafa Constantine, nearly six years earlier. Both women's stories would have a lasting impact on terrorism in Egypt and abroad in the coming decade. Constantine, the wife of a Coptic priest in the Nile Delta town of Abu al-Matamir in al-Beheira province 25 miles southeast of Alexandria, disappeared from her home on November 27, 2004.¹²⁸ Rumors circulated following Constantine's disappearance that she had been kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam.¹²⁹ Demonstrations erupted and Coptic protesters staged a sit-in at Saint Mark's Cathedral in Cairo in early December 2004. On the sixth day of the sit-in, December 8, Pope Shenouda III went in retreat to the expansive Saint Bishoy monastery complex in the Nile Delta's Wadi Natrun, suspending his weekly Wednesday sermon that was to take place that evening. Bishop Jeremiah, who was the secretary of Pope Shenouda III at that time as well, stated that the Pope would remain secluded until a solution was reached in reference to the Wafa Constantine case.¹³⁰

The Pope's retreat escalated the situation and several thousand Coptic demonstrators clashed with riot police outside Saint Mark's Cathedral that evening.¹³¹ The following morning, the standoff between the Coptic protestors and the security

¹²⁷ Zakaria, Hoda and Hassan Abdul Ghaffar. [in Arabic] "Finding the Wife of a Priest from Minya Who was Missing," *al-Youm al-Sabah*, July 24, 2010, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2010/7/24/VkAFutWrS->

¹²⁸ "Copts Demonstrating in Cairo and Sectarian Clashes in Minya," [in Arabic] *al-Jazeera*, December 8, 2004, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2004/12/8/A7>

¹²⁹ "Egyptian Pope Goes Into Seclusion," BBC, December 20, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4110861.stm

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ "International Religious Freedom Report 2005," US Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, November 8, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/51598.htm>

forces outside Saint Mark's Cathedral came to an end when Constantine was returned to the protective custody and supervision of the Church.¹³² Coptic officials held a press conference afterwards stating that Constantine had not been forced against her will to convert to Islam.¹³³ A week after Constantine was returned to the church, Egypt's General Prosecutor Maher Abdel Wahed stated that Constantine had gone to police saying that she wished to convert to Islam, but after meeting with Church officials she decided to remain a Christian.¹³⁴ Nothing has been heard of Constantine since her return to the Church and it is believed she remains secluded in a church facility.

The case of Wafa Constantine exacerbated tensions and risked inflaming sectarian strife between Copts and Muslims throughout the country. The government and the Church, however, managed to maintain the crisis to a large extent, at least for the time being. The tensions were stoked once again by the Camilia affair in 2010. After Camilia's return to her family and the Church, a prominent local Salafi Sheikh Moftah Mohamed Fadel, better known as Abu Yahya, propagated rumors claiming that Camilia had converted to Islam and sought his help to authenticate her conversion.

Abu Yahya told his story in an interview with Khalid Harabi, the director of the Islamic Observatory for the Resistance of Christianization, which was published online on August 18.¹³⁵ According to Abu Yahya, he received a phone call from a colleague on July 20 whom Camilia sought for help to officially convert to Islam by completing the proper documentation at al-Azhar Mosque. Camilia spoke with Abu Yahya on the phone

¹³² "International Religious Freedom Report 2005," US Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, November 8, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/51598.htm>

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ "Egyptian Pope Goes Into Seclusion," BBC, December 20, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4110861.stm

¹³⁵ "In the First Dialogue with him, Abu Yahya Blows Up New Surprises in the Case of the Captive Muslim." [in Arabic] Islamic Observatory for the Resistance of Christianization, August 18, 2010, http://www.tanseerel.com/main/articles.aspx?selected_article_no=9785

telling him that she had converted to Islam secretly a year and a half prior and had decided to make her conversion public and official. Abu Yahya agreed to meet with her and the following morning she arrived at his home in Cairo accompanied by Abu Mohamed, the colleague of Abu Yahya. Before taking Camilia to al-Azhar he wanted to test her faith to be confident she was sincere and to comply with the Quran, which states:

*O you who believe! When believing women come to you as emigrants, examine them, Allah knows best as to their Faith, then if you ascertain that they are true believers, send them not back to the disbelievers, they are not lawful (wives) for the disbelievers nor are the disbelievers lawful (husbands) for them.*¹³⁶

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After hearing her story, testing her, and listening to her recite verses from the Quran he was convinced that her faith was sincere and conversion true. Abu Yahya and Abu Mohamed then escorted Camilia to al-Azhar Mosque to proclaim her faith and obtain legal documentation of her conversion to Islam. Upon arriving at al-Azhar they met with an official to complete the proper paperwork but after taking her identification and photos the official became alarmed and excused himself from the room. When the official returned, he stated that Sheikh Saeed Amer, Secretary General of Al-Azhar's Fatwa Committee and the individual responsible for officiating the conversions to Islam, was not available and had the only seal to complete the documentation. He advised them to come back the following day in order to finish the documentation process.

When the three returned to al-Azhar the next day, July 22, they noticed the presence of several priests and policemen. They left to avoid being noticed but were stopped by police near downtown Cairo. Abu Yahya alleged that the police pulled him

¹³⁶ The Noble Quran, al-Mumtahanah 60, Dar us Salam Publications, <http://www.noblequran.com/translation/>

and Camilia from the car and threw them in separate police vehicles taking him to the State Security Investigations Service (SSI) headquarters in the Cairo district of Nasr City before being released. Abu Yahya accused the Church of holding Camilia captive in one of the church monasteries after the Interior Ministry handed her over to the Church.¹³⁷

Abu Yahya's story reinforced the belief of many Muslims that the Egyptian government acquiesces to the Coptic Church's demands, effectively making it a state within a state. Protests calling for the release of Camilia intensified in the following days leading to the Coptic Church's decision for Camilia to appear in a video to address the rumors and confirm that she is a Christian. On September 8, 2010, privately owned news site al-Youm al-Sabah broadcast a taped video message of Camilia clarifying her position as a Christian and denying the rumors about her conversion.¹³⁸ The video was then replayed on several state-owned TV stations. Despite Camilia's video appearance and rebuttal of the accusations against her, protests continued amidst questions of the videos authenticity. Making his first public statement about the crisis consuming the media, Pope Shenouda III insisted on the videos authenticity in a televised interview on September 19th but to no avail as the protests continued.¹³⁹

Al-Qaeda began to try to subtly exploit the tensions taking place in Egypt invigorated by the Camilia and Constantine affairs. By October, al-Qaeda was including a single sentence displayed at the close of two videos published through its media arm al-Sahab. The two videos had little or nothing to do with Egypt but ended by asking the

¹³⁷ "Islam Story of Kamilia, the Wife of a Priest in Deir Mawas and the Details of Her Abduction and Return to the Church," [in Arabic] Egypt Window, August 19, 2010, http://www.egyptwindow.net/news_Details.aspx?News_ID=9334

¹³⁸ Abdul al-Qader, Shawqi. "Egyptian Television Confirms the Validity of the Video of Camilia Shehata." [in Arabic] *al-Youm al-Sabah*, September 10, 2010, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2010/9/10/VkAl9dWRS->

¹³⁹ Bayoumi, Amr. "Coptic Pope makes first public comments on Camillia Shehata video," *Egypt Independent*, September 20, 2010, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/coptic-pope-makes-first-public-comments-camillia-shehata-video>

question “Who will come to the aid of Wafa Constantine and Camilia Shehata and their sisters?”^{140 141} In a third video published by al-Sahab, al-Qaeda expanded on the question asking, “Who will come to the aid of Wafa Constantine and Camilia Shehata and their sisters? Where are the youths of Islam who truly care for the oppressed Muslim women?” The subtleness of these questions tacked to the end of unrelated videos was abruptly exchanged for violence by an al-Qaeda affiliate, not in Egypt however, but rather in Iraq.

A Church in Baghdad

More than 100 people crowded into the sanctuary of the Lady of Our Salvation Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad, Iraq to attend the Sunday Mass at 5:30pm on October 31, 2010.¹⁴² Shortly after the worshipers settled into their pews, an SUV pulled up to a side street next to the church carrying five men armed with assault rifles, grenades, and wearing explosive belts. The gunmen fired at two guards at the nearby Iraq Stock Market Exchange, which lies caddie corner to the church, before scaling the seven-foot security wall surrounding the church’s outer courtyard. Once within the church’s confines, they allegedly detonated explosives packed into their vehicle¹⁴³ and entered the church sanctuary opening fire on several of the churchgoers and executing the pastor, Waseem Sabeeh.¹⁴⁴ Before the gunmen made it into the church, several of the

¹⁴⁰ “The Arabs And Muslims: between the Conferences of Desertion..and the individual Duty of Jihad,” [in Arabic] as-Sahab Media, Jihadology, October 23, 2010, https://videos.files.wordpress.com/QNOe8cO7/arb4_std.mp4

¹⁴¹ “A Letter for the People of France,” [in Arabic] as-Sahab Media, Jihadology, October 27, 2010, https://videos.files.wordpress.com/3tU1jXf7/d8b1d8b3d8a7d984d8a9-d985d986-d8a7d984d8b4d98ad8ae-d8a7d8b3d8a7d985d8a9-d8a8d986-d984d8a7d8afd986-d8a7d984d98a-d8a7d984d8b4d8b9d8a8-d8a7_std.mp4

¹⁴² Londono, Ernesto and Aziz Alwan. “51 Iraq Worshipers, 7 troops killed in church siege,” The Washington Post, November 1, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/31/AR2010103101395.html>

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Shadid, Anthony. “Church Attack Seen as Strike at Iraq’s Core,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/02/world/middleeast/02iraq.html>

congregants were ushered into a back room where they barricaded themselves until help could arrive. Most of those who would survive the siege had taken refuge there.¹⁴⁵

Soon after the assault, al-Qaeda's al-Fajr Media Center published a statement from the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), also known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the precursor to ISIS, claiming responsibility for the attack. The siege, according to the statement, was carried out by a handful of mujahideen under instructions by ISI's War Ministry to support the "defenseless imprisoned Muslim sisters in the land of Muslim Egypt." Also included was an ultimatum to the Coptic Church and Pope in Egypt, giving the Church 48-hours to release all of the Muslim women they claimed to be imprisoned in monasteries in Egypt. Indicating that the attackers were wearing explosive belts, the statement clarified that if the Church refused to comply, the Christian hostages in Iraq would be killed.¹⁴⁶

Al-Baghdadia TV station, which is owned by Iraqi exiles living in Egypt, allegedly received a phone call from the terrorists inside the Lady of Our Salvation Church as the siege was ongoing to relay their demands.¹⁴⁷ The TV station immediately broadcast the terrorist's demands, which included the release of al-Qaeda prisoners in Iraq, Egypt, and other Muslim countries. That same night, Iraqi security forces stormed

¹⁴⁵ Shadid, Anthony. "Church Attack Seen as Strike at Iraq's Core," *The New York Times*, November 1, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/02/world/middleeast/02iraq.html>

¹⁴⁶ "Warning to the Egyptian Christian Church," Islamic State of Iraq, Jihadology, October 31, 2010, <http://jihadology.net/2010/10/31/new-statement-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-al-qa%E2%80%99idah-in-iraq-warning-to-the-egyptian-christian-church/>

¹⁴⁷ Al-Tamimi, Aymenn Jawad. "Iraq: One Year After Withdrawal," *The American Spectator*, December 18, 2012, <http://spectator.org/articles/34235/iraq-one-year-after-withdrawal>

the TV station broadcast center in Baghdad, cut power to the station, and arrested two employees for its dissemination of the terrorists' demands.¹⁴⁸

To clarify their demands still further, ISI released an audio statement from a member of the group's martyrdom-seeking battalion.¹⁴⁹ The militant reaffirmed the 48-hour deadline for the Egyptian Coptic Church to release the Muslim women who are alleged to be held captive by the Church, this time specifically naming Wafa Constantine and Camilia Shehata. "If you make your churches into prisons for Muslim women, we will make them into tombs for you," adding another warning that if the demand is not met, the killing of the hostages in Iraq will not be the end, but that all Christians in the region would become targets.¹⁵⁰ Not that it would have made any difference, but the church did not have even four hours to respond, let alone 48 hours.

Iraqi security forces quickly positioned themselves outside the church compound after the militants stormed the church taking more than a hundred people hostage. Shortly after 9pm, less than four hours after the siege began, Iraqi special forces battled their way into the church compound in an effort to free the hostages.¹⁵¹ When it became clear that the Iraqi commandos were going to overwhelm the militants, they detonated their suicide vests resulting in devastating loss of life among both the hostages and Iraqi special

¹⁴⁸ Al-Rubaie, Sabri. "Scandal..When the Use of Force is Misplaced!," [in Arabic] *al-Baghdadi*, April 5, 2012, <http://www.albaghdadia.com/index.php/writings/item/1058-jzhng%D8%A9-bvkavk-ildla-byobgdl-akjn%D8%A9-jn-ine-lgkma>

¹⁴⁹ "To the Christians in Egypt," [in Arabic] Islamic State of Iraq, Jihadology, November 1, 2010, <http://jihadology.net/2010/11/01/new-audio-message-from-the-soldiers-of-the-martyrs-battalion-islamic-state-of-iraq-al-qa%E2%80%99idah-to-the-christians-in-egypt/>

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ "Londono, Ernesto. "Survivors describe deadly attack on Baghdad church," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 1, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/01/AR2010110104420.html?sid=ST2010110104430>

forces. By the end of the operation, seven Iraqi commandos and 51 hostages laid dead bringing the total body count to 58, not including the five terrorists.¹⁵²

ISI told a somewhat different story two days later on November 2 when it provided its own account and details of the attack. ISI claimed that its five fighters used a VBIED, multiple IEDs, and small arms fire to kill dozens of Iraqi special forces soldiers during more than five hours of fighting before the commandos finally breached the walls and entered the church courtyard. The militants then detonated their suicide vests claiming that no less than 60 elite special forces soldiers were killed, with no mention of the number of fatalities among the hostages. The statement also referenced the Iraqi government's implementation of a media blackout of the mujahideen's demands, likely alluding to the forced power cuts to al-Baghdadia TV station after it had received a phone call from the terrorists and briefly aired their demands before being shut down by security forces. Most significantly, however, was the announcement that with the expiration of the 48-hour deadline and no response from the Egyptian Coptic Church to its demands, all Christian centers, organizations, institutions, leaders and adherents would be considered legitimate targets.¹⁵³

In Egypt, demonstrations continued at several mosques mostly taking place following Friday prayers, the day when Muslims gather at mosques to listen to sermons and pray together. Security at churches were increased and riot police were visibly present at large Salafi demonstrations in front of the Commander Ibrahim Mosque in

¹⁵² Londono, Ernesto and Aziz Alwan. "51 Iraq Worshipers, 7 troops killed in church siege," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/31/AR2010103101395.html>

¹⁵³ "New Statement from the Ministry of War of the Islamic State of Iraq." Jihadology, November 3, 2010, <http://jihadology.net/2010/11/03/new-statement-from-the-ministry-of-war-of-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-al-qa%E2%80%99idah-in-iraq/>

Alexandria on the first Friday following the church massacre in Iraq.¹⁵⁴ In a comment he would likely later regret, Minister of Religious Endowments Dr. Mahmoud Hamdi Zaqzouq described the recent threats and calls by al-Qaeda to target Egyptian churches as “hollow.” Addressing the issue of Camilia Shehata, Zaqzouq noted that al-Azhar’s records show no evidence of her converting to Islam also commenting that rumors had fueled the sectarian strife.¹⁵⁵

A Church in Alexandria

On December 31, 2010, Coptic Christians at the Church of the Two Saints in Alexandria, Egypt ushered in the New Year as usual, like most Copts in Egypt, by attending the annual New Year’s Eve midnight Mass. As the Mass ended and worshipers filed out of the church’s front door shortly after midnight, an explosion rang out across the city. A suicide bomber had detonated an explosive device as the worshipers exited the church. Early reports suggested that it may have been a VBIED that was detonated outside the church; however, that was later ruled out by Egypt’s Interior Ministry which stated a suicide bomber, wearing an explosive vest packed with nails and ball bearings, carried out the attack.¹⁵⁶ The initial death toll from the bombing was 21, all Copts, with nearly 100 others injured,¹⁵⁷ including eight Muslims.¹⁵⁸ A few days later on January 4,

¹⁵⁴ Abu al-Azz, Hana. “Alexandria Demonstration to Demand the Release of Camilia Shehata,” *al-Youm al-Sabah*, November 5, 2010, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2010/11/5/VkBAENWrS-9>

¹⁵⁵ Nawar, Rami. “Zaqzouq to ‘Life and People:’ There is no executor on Egypt..it will not be able to dictate to Egypt on anything no matter what its strength..and al-Azhar records has no evidence that Camilia Shehata converted to Islam.” [in Arabic] *al-Youm al-Sabah*, November 9, 2010, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2010/11/9/VkBA1NWrS-9>

¹⁵⁶ Fahim, Kareem and Liam Stack. “Fatal Bomb Hits a Church in Egypt,” *The New York Times*, January 1, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/02/world/middleeast/02egypt.html>

¹⁵⁷ Bayoumi, Sherine. “Christians clash with police in Egypt after attack on churchgoers kills 21,” *The Washington Post*, January 1, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/01/AR2011010102697.html>

2011, Egypt's official news agency MENA announced that the death toll had risen to 23.¹⁵⁹ Several media outlets continued to report that 21 had been killed in the bombing but the US State Department's 2011 Country Reports on Terrorism as well as the 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom both confirmed the number of dead at 23.¹⁶⁰

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There were no credible claims of responsibility for the attack and the government was quick to blame foreign elements, likely in an effort to ease sectarian tensions already brimming over from the Camilia affair.¹⁶² On January 23, 2011, Interior Minister Habib al-Adly announced in a nationally televised speech that Egyptian authorities had "conclusive evidence" of the involvement of the Gaza-based militant group Army of Islam, which at the time had loose ties to al-Qaeda.¹⁶³ A spokesman for the Army of Islam denied its involvement in the attack accusing, sensationally, the Israeli Mossad of carrying out the attack.¹⁶⁴ Despite the claim of conclusive evidence, the only evidence publicly announced was the alleged confession of one of nearly 300 Salafists who were arrested in the days following the attack. The Interior Ministry alleged that Ahmed Lotfi Ibrahim Mohamed, an Egyptian, confessed to helping organize the attack for the Army of

¹⁵⁸ Knell, Yolande. "Egypt bomb kills 21 at Alexandria Coptic church," *BBC*, January 1, 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12101748>

¹⁵⁹ Fayed, Shaimaa and Sherine el-Madany. "Egypt church blast death toll rises to 23," *Reuters*, January 4, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/04/us-egypt-church-idUSTRE7010M020110104#QxUwq8C3rT5PKwv9.97>

¹⁶⁰ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2011." US Department of State: Office of Coordinator for Counterterrorism, July 31, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195544.htm>

¹⁶¹ "Report on International Religious Freedom 2011." US Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, July 30, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/nea/192881.htm>

¹⁶² Bradley, Matt. "Egypt Investigates Deadly Church Bombing," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 2, 2011, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703384504576055213837036504>

¹⁶³ Slackman, Michael. "Egypt Links Palestinians to Attacks at Church," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/24/world/middleeast/24egypt.html>

¹⁶⁴ "The Palestinian Army of Islam militant group has denied responsibility for a New Year's Day attack on a church in the Egyptian city of Alexandria that killed more than 20 people, rejecting claims made by the government in Cairo earlier on Sunday," *AFP*, Jan. 24, 2011, <http://www.france24.com/en/20110123-palestinian-army-islam-denies-responsibility-new-year-church-bombing-alexandria-adly-egypt>

Islam.¹⁶⁵ Two days after the announcement, the Egyptian revolution broke out and no other evidence has ever surfaced connecting the Army of Islam with the Alexandria bombing. In fact, all the suspects who were arrested in connection with the bombing, with the exception of one, who died in custody after prolonged torture, were released following the revolution due to insufficient evidence linking them to the bombing.¹⁶⁶ To this day, the true perpetrators of the bombing remain unknown but it is not difficult to imagine that al-Qaeda, if not directly involved, inspired the attacks, at least in part, due to the controversy swirling around the Camilia Shehata affair.

Demonstrations Intensify

Demonstrations advocating for the release of Camilia Shehata continued in spite of the January revolution and ousting of long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak (see chapter 1). Not only did the protests continue but they even expanded. The Coalition for the Support of New Muslims, a new Salafist organization that emerged after the revolution with ties to Khalid Harabi and the Islamic Observatory for Resistance to Christianization,¹⁶⁷ held several demonstrations during the first half of 2011 in support of Camilia demanding her release.¹⁶⁸ Abu Yahya, the Salifist sheikh who propagated the rumor that Camilia had converted to Islam and who is a prominent figure within the Coalition for the Support of New Muslims, helped lead demonstrations of thousands of

¹⁶⁵ Bradley, Matt. "Egypt Says Gaza Militants Were Behind New Year's Church Bomb," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 24, 2011, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703398504576099932110457122>

¹⁶⁶ "Report on International Religious Freedom 2011." US Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, July 30, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/nea/192881.htm>

¹⁶⁷ Zaki, Amir, "For the sake of caring for new Muslims," *al-Shuruq al-Jadid*, June 12, 2011, <http://www.arabwestreport.info/en/year-2011/week-24/12-sake-caring-new-muslims>

¹⁶⁸ "Report on International Religious Freedom 2011." US Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, July 30, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/nea/192881.htm>

Muslims in front of Saint Mark's Cathedral on April 29, 2011.¹⁶⁹ The scope of the demonstrations in front of Saint Mark's Cathedral is likely what prompted the hour-long interview of Camilia and her husband Priest Tedaos along with their young son, which was conducted by Coptic satellite Channel al-Hayat and was broadcast on May 7, 2011.¹⁷⁰ Once again, Camilia denied that she ever converted to Islam stating that she was born a Christian and would die a Christian and that she had simply left her home after a feud with her husband. She also insisted that she does not know Abu Yahya and the photo depicting her wearing a veil, used by Muslims as proof of her conversion, was fabricated.¹⁷¹

Within hours of the broadcast and perhaps because of the Camilia interview, the Coalition for the Support of New Muslims organized what was essentially a mob and marched toward Saint Mina church in the Imbaba district of Cairo's western suburb of Giza. The Salafist coalition had spread a rumor that another woman, named Abeer Talaat, was being held in the church after her alleged conversion to Islam.¹⁷² The crowd that gathered, which numbered more than 500 Muslims, attempted to search Saint Mina church for the captive woman but was prevented by local Christians and violent clashes broke out. The crisis quickly escalated and the rioting subsided only after the police and military got involved; a total of 15 people were left dead and over 200 wounded by the

¹⁶⁹ Diab, Amr and Mahmoud Hefnawy. "Salafi Intifada in the Streets of Cairo," *al-Youm al-Sabah*, April 29, 2011, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2011/4/29/VkBLtWrS-9>

¹⁷⁰ Rizk, Mustafa. "Camilia Shehata in a Televised Interview: I am a Christian and did not Convert to Islam," *al-Masry al-Youm*, May 7, 2011, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/130382>

¹⁷¹ "Meeting of Camilia Shehata on channel Life," [in Arabic] Youtube, May 7, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4kjpKH_9bA

¹⁷² "Woman at centre of Imbaba violence appears on TV," *Ahram Online*, May 10, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/11773/Egypt/Politics-/Woman-at-centre-of-Imbaba-violence-appears-on-TV.aspx>

end of the night's sectarian clashes.¹⁷³ Police eventually arrested more than 200 people involved in the incident including Sheikh Abu Yahya, who was arrested in June 2011 accused of inciting the violence in Imbaba.¹⁷⁴ ¹⁷⁵ Then in July, similar to the 2007 court finding that legally settled the Wafa Constantine case,¹⁷⁶ the State Council Administrative Court rejected a lawsuit which would have forced the church to reveal Camilia's whereabouts and require her to appear in court to attest to her faith.¹⁷⁷

These three events, the hour long televised interview with Camilia in early May, the arrest of Abu Yahya in June, and the court's rejection of the lawsuit in July brought an end to the majority of demonstrations calling for Camilia's return that had engulfed the country throughout the previous year. This, however, would not be the last time that Egypt felt the reverberating effects of the Wafa Constantine and Camilia Shehata affairs.

More than three years later, in late December 2014, seven Egyptian Copts were abducted in the coastal Libyan city of Sirte.¹⁷⁸ Less than a week after that, gunmen stormed a residential compound in the same Libyan city and took another 13 Egyptian Copts captive.¹⁷⁹ The perpetrators of the attack remained unknown until January 12, 2015 when ISIS' Wilayat Tarabulus [Tripoli Province] published a photo set online showing the 20 captive Egyptians with a caption reading, "soldiers of the Islamic State carried out

¹⁷³ "Report on International Religious Freedom 2011." US Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, July 30, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/nea/192881.htm>

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Ismail, Mohamed. "Abu Yahya Arrested and Forwarded to the Supreme State Security Prosecutor," [in Arabic] *al-Youm al-Sabah*, June 5, 2011, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2011/6/5/VkBPgNWrs->

¹⁷⁶ "International Religious Freedom Report 2007." US Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, September 2007, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2007/90209.htm>

¹⁷⁷ "Report on International Religious Freedom 2011." US Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, July 30, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/nea/192881.htm>

¹⁷⁸ Abdul al-Gawad, Mohamed. "Bakr on the Abduction of 7 Egyptians in Libya: What did you do for them Foreign [Ministry]?", [in Arabic] *al-Masry al-Youm*, January 2, 2015, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/619018>

¹⁷⁹ Abdelleh, Mohamed, Teresa Kamal and Ali Abdelatti. "Thirteen Egyptian Christians kidnapped in Libay - state media," *Reuters*, January 3, 2015, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/01/03/uk-egypt-libya-kidnapping-idUKKBN0KC0LY20150103>

the abduction of 21 Christian crusaders in different areas of Tripoli province;” the 21st captive was not shown in the photos that were released.¹⁸⁰

One month on, ISIS released its seventh issue of its premier magazine *Dabiq*, published in multiple languages, and included in it an article titled “Revenge for the Muslimat (i.e., Muslim women) Persecuted by the Coptic Crusaders of Egypt.”¹⁸¹ The article announced the capture of the 21 Christians in Libya and recalled the attack on the Lady of Our Salvation church in Baghdad years earlier. It stated that the operation was revenge for Wafa Constantine, Camilia Shehata, and other sisters whom they allege were tortured and murdered by the Coptic Church in Egypt. The article continued, saying that at the time, the Islamic State, then the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), was far from Egypt so it opted to take action against the Christians in Iraq. Now, years later, the Islamic State’s expansion to Libya and Sinai, it claimed, has allowed it to capture Coptic Christians striking terror directly into the hearts of the Copts. The *Dabiq* article closed by saying, “Finally, it is important for Muslims everywhere to know that there is no doubt in the great reward to be found on Judgment Day for those who spill the blood of these Coptic crusaders wherever they may be found.”¹⁸² What was most concerning, and of much angst to the families of those taken captive, were two photos included in the magazine. One photo showed several of the Egyptian captives wearing orange jumpsuits, hands bound behind their backs, being escorted along a beach by masked militants dressed in black. The second photo similarly showed several of the captives kneeling on the beach,

¹⁸⁰ “The Captive Crusaders of the Hand of the Islamic State,” [in Arabic] Photo Report Wilayat Tarabulus, Justpaste.it, January 12, 2015, <http://justpaste.it/iv5h>

¹⁸¹ “Revenge for the Muslimat women.” *Dabiq* Issue 7, February 12, 2015, <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-dabiq-magazine-issue-7-from-hypocrisy-to-apostasy.pdf>

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

hands bound, with the militants ominously standing directly behind them wielding knives.

ISIS did not wait long to confirm what everyone already suspected. On February 15, 2015, three days after the magazine's release, ISIS' al-Hayat Media Center published an online video from Wilayat Tarabulus showing the beheading of the 21 Christians.¹⁸³ The video, titled "A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross" was produced in English and included Arabic subtitles. In the same manner as was depicted in the magazine three days before, the captives are paraded down the beach wearing orange jumpsuits and with hands bound. They are forced to their knees as a caption displayed on the screen reads "The people of the cross, the followers of the hostile Egyptian Church." All the militants are clad in black except one; standing out among them he is wearing camouflage fatigues. Pointing a knife towards the camera he speaks in English boasting of ISIS' expansion in Libya and warning that there is no safety for the Crusaders. After conducting the gruesome beheadings a caption displayed on the screen reads "This filthy blood is just some of what awaits you, in revenge for Camilia and her sisters."¹⁸⁴

The 21st victim who was beheaded remains somewhat of a mystery. He was prominently shown in the video front and center kneeling in front of the militant who addressed the camera in English. He is visibly of African descent and almost certainly not from Egypt. The Coptic Church of Minya governorate in Egypt, where the captives were from, could only identify and name 20 of the victims.¹⁸⁵ The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also stated that 20 had been Egyptians while the final victim had yet to be

¹⁸³ "A Message Signed With Blood To the Nation of the Cross," Wilayat Tarabulus, Archive.org, February 15, 2015, https://archive.org/details/resala_dmaa_alhayat

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Jones, Sophia. "ISIS Boasted Of These Christians' Deaths. Here Are The Lives They Lived," Huffington Post, February 18, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/18/isis-christians-killed-_n_6703278.html

identified.¹⁸⁶ Unconfirmed reports claimed that the 21st victim was either Ghanaian or Chadian but neither report has been corroborated.

ISIS has often sought to foment sectarian strife throughout its operational domains across the Middle East. Egypt is no different, as the February 2015 beheading indicate, ISIS continues to use the cases of Camilia Shehata and Wafa Constantine in its propaganda to justify its heinous acts against Christians and, at the same time, to inflame sectarian tensions in Egypt. Although Egypt has yet to witness sectarian conflict to the same extent as that in Iraq and Syria, the potential for large-scale sectarian violence is a real concern.

¹⁸⁶ “Egypt: 20 Egyptians Beheaded in Libya, Not 21 - Diocese in Minya,” Aswat Masriya, February 17, 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201502180886.html>

CHAPTER 5: MULTINATIONAL FORCE AND OBSERVERS (MFO)

Origins

The Camp David Accords, two agreements signed by Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on September 17, 1978, set the stage for the signing of the Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty and what would become the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO). The Accords originally intended for the United Nations to provide a peacekeeping force to be stationed in the Sinai after Israel's withdrawal.¹⁸⁷ When the Peace Treaty was signed in March 1979 Annex I, often referred to as the Security Annex, stipulated the terms of the withdrawal, established zones with limitations on force deployments, and specified the role of United Nations forces and observers yet to be formed.¹⁸⁸ As the treaty was being formed all the parties involved were aware that the UN Security Council may not approve stationing UN peacekeepers in the Sinai on a permanent basis. Therefore, shortly after the treaty was signed, the US agreed that the already present US Sinai Field Mission would perform some of the verification responsibilities identified in the Security Annex. Two years later, with an impasse at the United Nations over the deployment of UN peacekeepers to the Sinai, negotiations began to consider establishing a peacekeeping force apart from the UN. An agreement was reached and the Protocol to the Treaty of Peace was signed on August 3, 1981, formally establishing the Multinational Force and Observers.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ "Camp David Accords," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 17, 1978, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/camp%20david%20accords.aspx>

¹⁸⁸ "Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 26, 1979, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Guide/Pages/Israel-Egypt%20Peace%20Treaty.aspx>

¹⁸⁹ "Origins," Multinational Force and Observers, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://mfo.org/en/origins>

Today, there are twelve nations contributing contingents to the MFO with the United States providing 692 of the nearly 1,700 strong force.¹⁹⁰ The mission is headquartered in Rome where the Force's Director General and his staff are located. The Director General maintains representative offices in Cairo and in Tel Aviv. In the Sinai itself, the MFO is stationed in two large camps, one in the south the other in the north, and operated 26 remote sites¹⁹¹ until its withdrawal from one remote site on September 6, 2015. The MFO withdrew its personnel from the site due to its inability to safely resupply it.¹⁹²

MFO Under Attack

The MFO's mission helps to facilitate cooperation and dialogue between Israel and Egypt on matters of mutual interest, such as cross border smuggling and threats posed by militant groups. This cooperation and dialogue in turn enhances trust between the two governments, which has led to even greater cooperation, including militarily, something unthinkable when the MFO was first established. Because of the MFO's role as a political binder between Egypt and Israel it is curious that throughout its time operating in the Sinai it has yet to be targeted in a consistent or significant way, that is, perhaps, until just recently.

Throughout the 1980s and even at the peak of Egypt's terrorism crisis in the 1990s the MFO was never targeted. Much of the reasoning for that is simply because the terrorism that gripped Egypt in the 1980s and 1990s was located around Cairo and in Upper Egypt,

¹⁹⁰ "MFO Troop Contributors," Multinational Force and Observers, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://mfo.org/en/contingents>

¹⁹¹ "Remote Sites," Multinational Force and Observers, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://mfo.org/en/remote-sites>

¹⁹² "Removal of MFO Personnel from Checkpoint 1-F," Multinational Force and Observers, accessed September 14, 2015, <http://mfo.org/en/news/37>

far from the Sinai Peninsula. In the mid 2000s, when a number of militant groups did spring up in the Sinai, attacks never focused on the MFO, but rather targeted tourist locations believed to be frequented by Israelis. Although there were a few occasions when MFO personnel came under attack, these were isolated incidents and attacks on the MFO never became the new paradigm in the Sinai.

On August 15, 2005, for the first time in its 23 years history, MFO personnel were attacked in North Sinai. An IED detonated near an MFO vehicle just outside the North Camp but it did not seriously injure any members of the MFO.¹⁹³ One of the many militant groups allegedly operating on the peninsula at the time, Mujahideen of Egypt, claimed responsibility for the attack asserting that the attack had killed three Israelis and two Canadians.¹⁹⁴ While North Sinai's governor at the time, Abdel Hamid, stated that two female Canadian MFO soldiers were slightly wounded from the blast, the militant claim that Israelis were killed was likely include in an attempt to justify the attack.¹⁹⁵

The MFO was targeted for a second time early the following year. On April 26, 2006, a suicide bomber wearing an SVEST leaped onto the hood of an unarmored MFO vehicle in North Sinai and detonated his explosive vest. The explosion shattered the windshield of the vehicle but all the occupants were unharmed, the bomber was the only casualty. Shortly thereafter, an Egyptian police vehicle responding to the incident was also attacked when a second bomber on a bicycle detonated an SVEST next to the police vehicle. Similar to the first attack, the bomber was the only casualty.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ "Director General's Report to the 2005 Trilateral Meeting," MFO 2005 Annual Report, November 14, 2005, http://media.mc-testzone.com/mfo/documents/annual_report_2005.pdf

¹⁹⁴ "Group claims Sinai peacekeeper attack," *al-Jazeera*, August 15, 2005, <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2005/08/2008410142815267163.html>

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ "Director General's Report to the 2006 Trilateral Meeting," MFO 2006 Annual Report, November 13, 2006, http://media.mc-testzone.com/mfo/documents/annual_report_2006.pdf

By this time, the attacks against the MFO only added to the fear of the return of Islamic militancy in Egypt to levels not witnessed since the late 1990s. Other than the target themselves—international peacekeepers—the attacks against the MFO in 2005 and 2006 were insignificant compared to the three triple-bombings which shook South Sinai tourist resort towns in 2004, 2005, and 2006 killing at least 125 people and wounding several hundred. Each resort bombing was followed by intense security operations leading to the arrest of thousands but still the violence persisted.¹⁹⁷ After three consecutive years of spectacular attacks targeting Egypt's tourism it seemed as if the attacks would only continue; they did not however, and an uneasy calm was restored to the Sinai.

Following the revolution in January 2011, the sharp increase in violence in North Sinai, in general, necessitated that force protection become the highest priority for the MFO. Egyptian Central Security police installations in North Sinai were attacked and abandoned by the end of January 2011 forcing the Egyptian military to deploy to areas of North Sinai, with approval from Israel, where they are usually restricted under terms of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty.¹⁹⁸ For the first time since 2006, an MFO vehicle was struck by an IED on May 27, 2011 near the border with the Gaza Strip. The device was detonated remotely from the Gaza side of the border and caused extensive damage to the Fully Armored Vehicle (FAV) but its occupants were not seriously wounded.¹⁹⁹ Throughout the turbulent year of 2011, this IED attack was the only violent attack in which the MFO was involved.

¹⁹⁷ "Egypt: Mass Arrests and Torture in Sinai," Human Rights Watch, February, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/egypt0205.pdf>

¹⁹⁸ "Director General's Report to the 2011 Trilateral Meeting," MFO 2011 Annual Report, November 17, 2011, http://media.mc-testzone.com/mfo/documents/annual_report_2011.pdf

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

The situation in the Sinai continued to deteriorate and the MFO reported heavier weapons appearing throughout the Sinai in 2012. Several incidents involving the MFO took place throughout 2012. It has proven difficult to determine with any certainty exactly what transpired in several events that involve the MFO. The MFO's own reporting of the incidents typically seems to try and lessen the significance of any confrontations with the local population while media reports appear to over exaggerate the incidents. For example, numerous media reports claimed that in March of 2012 a "band of armed tribesmen surrounded" the MFO North Camp for eight days demanding the government release detainees accused of participation in the 2004 and 2005 South Sinai bombings.^{200 201} Conversely, the MFO reported that "peaceful" "demonstrators" cut off road access to the North Camp for eight days causing a disruption to normal operations.²⁰²

Furthermore, three days after demonstrators scaled the walls of the US Embassy in Cairo and replaced the American flag with a black flag with the inscription "there is no god but God and Mohamed is the messenger of God," the MFO witnessed its most significant attack to date.²⁰³ According to the MFO 2012 annual report, on September 14, 2012, "a violent crowd" broke through the North Camp's perimeter defenses and entered the camp throwing Molotov cocktails, at least one explosive device, and firing weapons. Specific details on how the fighting came to an end remain unclear but according to the

²⁰⁰ Lazareva, Inna. "Sinai peacekeepers under siege as Egypt battles Islamists," *The Telegraph*, September 17, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/10316199/Sinai-peacekeepers-under-siege-as-Egypt-battles-Islamists.html>

²⁰¹ Schenker, David. "Chaos in the Sinai: Will International Peacekeepers Be the Next Casualty?," *The Weekly Standard*, May 24, 2013, http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/chaos-sinai-will-international-peacekeepers-be-next-casualty_728974.html

²⁰² "Director General's Report to the 2012 Trilateral Meeting," MFO 2012 Annual Report, November 15, 2012, http://media.mc-testzone.com/mfo/documents/annual_report_2012.pdf

²⁰³ "Mysterious Anti-Muslim Movie Prompts Protest in Egypt," *AP*, September 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/world/middleeast/movie-stirs-protest-at-us-embassy-in-cairo.html>

MFO report, MFO soldiers “compelled” the “protesters” to leave the camp and the Egyptian military then “dispersed the crowd.”²⁰⁴ The attack left eight MFO personnel wounded and caused extensive damage to the base, including the destruction of a ballistically protected guard tower and a fire truck.²⁰⁵

The MFO report appears to downplay the attack by describing the perpetrators with the terms “protesters” and “a violent crowd”. While it is possible, and even likely, that many were simply demonstrating peacefully in front of the camp in order to have their demands responded to by the government, as was reported in the MFO’s 2011 annual report,²⁰⁶ at the very least, heavily armed militants took advantage of the situation. In order to not damage but to ultimately destroy a ballistically protected guard tower, as the MFO report states, the militants would have likely require heavy weapons as they stormed the compound. Moreover, in light of the elevated threat posed to the MFO following the overthrow of President Mubarak in February 2011, an inspection of all MFO sites was conducted. A force protection assessment of both camps and all remote sites was conducted by the U.S. Army Central Command (USCENTCOM) Joint Security Office in March 2011. As a direct result of the assessment, a new outer perimeter fence at the North Camp was completed in November 2011, additional perimeter lighting was installed, and a new chain link swing gate was installed at the Entry Control Point of the North Camp to increase the standoff distance outside the main gate.²⁰⁷ Despite these improvements to an already highly secure compound, the militants still managed to gain

²⁰⁴ “Director General’s Report to the 2012 Trilateral Meeting,” MFO 2012 Annual Report, November 15, 2012, http://media.mc-testzone.com/mfo/documents/annual_report_2012.pdf

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ “Director General’s Report to the 2011 Trilateral Meeting,” MFO 2011 Annual Report, November 17, 2011, http://media.mc-testzone.com/mfo/documents/annual_report_2011.pdf

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

access into the camp, suggesting the assault must have been just that, a well-armed assault, and not a protest turned violent.

Media reports tell a similar story but without couching it in terms of protests. According some reports, the attack took place around 8pm, an unlikely time for protests, when 60-70 gunmen stormed the camp amid heavy gunfire and wounded several MFO members, at least two of whom had to be evacuated to Israel for medical treatment.^{208 209} Another report claimed that the militants raised a black flag and stood down only after a negotiated settlement.²¹⁰ A video surfaced on Youtube a couple days later showing dozens of people wandering throughout the camp with flames and smoke billowing in the background. One individual is seen hoisting a black flag above a ballistically protected guard tower.²¹¹ In all likelihood, the truth lies somewhere in between; regardless, the storming of the North Camp was an escalation but resulted in no fatalities and has not been repeated since. Following the incursion into North Camp in September 2012, additional defense precautions were put into place. The new defenses included the installation of eight additional ballistic towers along the camp's perimeter, an electronic intrusion detection system was installed along the outermost fence, and the interior fence

²⁰⁸ Times of Israel Staff. "Gunmen attack Sinai HQ of MFO peacekeeping force, four injured," *The Times of Israel*, September 14, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/gunmen-attack-sinai-headquarters-of-mfo-peacekeeping-force-several-reported-killed/>

²⁰⁹ Khoury, Jack, Gili Cohen, Yanir Yagna, and DPA. "Dozens of Militants Attack Peacekeeper Headquarters in Sinai, Three Wounded," *Haaretz*, September 14, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/dozens-of-militants-attack-peacekeeper-headquarters-in-sinai-three-wounded-1.465096>

²¹⁰ Lazareva, Inna. "Sinai peacekeepers under siege as Egypt battles Islamists," *The Telegraph*, September 17, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/10316199/Sinai-peacekeepers-under-siege-as-Egypt-battles-Islamists.html>

²¹¹ "Attack on the Multinational Force's Camp in North Sinai after the satirical film on the Holy Prophet," [in Arabic] Posted on Youtube by "alfares alshares", September 14, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1umCQX8Olc>

was upgraded to a hardened material in order to withstand attempts to cut through the fence.²¹²

Today, the question that is often asked regarding the MFO and Sinai militancy is, “why has ISIS not done more to attack the MFO?” The short answer is pragmatism. As Zack Gold, a Visiting Fellow at the Tel Aviv-based Institute for National Security Studies, rightly points out in his July 2015 article “Sinai Militancy and the Threat to International Forces,” the primary reason ISIS’ Wilayat Sinai has not conduct a major attack against the MFO is because of its importance to the local Bedouin economy.²¹³ The MFO provides direct employment to local Bedouin as well as indirect employment through the use of subcontractors providing annual incomes for hundreds of local Bedouin. Egypt’s public voiced many grievances against the government during the uprising in 2011, including low wages and demand higher incomes. Following the revolution, the MFO, which has a minimum wage higher than the Egyptian national minimum wage, mandated that its subcontractors pay all its local laborers the MFO minimum wage.²¹⁴ The positive impact that the MFO has on the locals has not been lost on the militants. Not because they view the MFO favorably, indeed they do not, but rather because they are keenly aware of how the local population turned against militant Islam, namely the Islamic Group, after the 1997 Luxor Massacre.

In the early morning on November 17, 1997 six young men infiltrated the bustling Queen Hatshepsut’s temple in Luxor disguised as policemen. As two of the men stood

²¹² “Director General’s Report to the 2013 Trilateral Meeting,” MFO 2013 Annual Report, November 21, 2013, http://media.mc-testzone.com/mfo/documents/annual_report_2013.pdf

²¹³ Gold, Zack. “Sinai Militancy and the Threat to International Forces,” Institute for National Security Studies’ Strategy Assessment, July 20, 2015, http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18_2ENG_3_Gold.pdf

²¹⁴ “Director General’s Report to the 2011 Trilateral Meeting,” MFO 2011 Annual Report, November 17, 2011, http://media.mc-testzone.com/mfo/documents/annual_report_2011.pdf

guard at the only entrance to — and exit from — the temple the other four spread out through the temple precinct shooting every tourist they came across. Those that lay wounded the gunmen would draw near, placing their guns to the victim's head and finish the job, stopping only to use their knives on some of the victims. The slaughter continued like this for 45 minutes with no response from local police. As they fled the scene they hijacked a bus looking for more tourists to ambush but instead drove into a police checkpoint. A shootout ensued wounding one of the militants who was then shot dead by his companions before they fled for a nearby cave where the remaining five gunmen apparently committed a ritualistic suicide. In all, 62 people were killed, not including the attackers, 58 of whom were foreign tourists. This attack decimated the tourist industry and left many, who relied on tourism for their livelihood, without a source of income. In response, a significant majority of the population turned against Islamic extremism and the Islamic Group in particular.²¹⁵

Wilayat Sinai relies on the local Bedouin of North Sinai for their very existence and does not wish to aggravate the local population in a way that would unite the Bedouin decisively against them, that is, at least until they are strong enough that no one would dare to challenge them, much like ISIS has done in communities throughout Iraq and Syria. This was the mistake made by the Islamic Group in 1997. The vast majority of the Islamic Group members were either living in exile abroad or imprisoned. The group was in no way strong enough to deter a popular uprising against it and its waning strength over the previous years caused it to lose support. The Luxor attack was meant to reinvigorate the jihad against the government but it had the opposite effect.

²¹⁵ Wright, Lawrence. "The Looming Tower: al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11," Vintage, New York, NY, 2006. pg. 291-292.

Wilayat Sinai, like Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis before it, largely refrained from attacks against the MFO for fear of it having a similar effect. Today however, Wilayat Sinai's strength is not in decline, conversely, its strength and capabilities have increased significantly. The intimidation campaigns conducted by the group works to deter any potential dissenters among the North Sinai population. Wilayat Sinai has been carefully testing reactions to its recent attacks against the MFO from among the Egyptian government, the international community, and most importantly the local community.

Wilayat Sinai decided to test reactions when on June 9, 2015 it claimed responsibility for a mortar and rocket attack against the al-Gorah airport, the airstrip utilized by and adjacent to the MFO North Camp. The attack, Wilayat Sinai claimed, was in retaliation for the arrest of a woman in Sheikh Zuweid but then followed up on its claim in a further attempt to justify the attack by describing the airstrip as belonging "to the Crusader forces for maintaining the security of Jews."²¹⁶ Several of the mortars and rockets fell inside the camp but did not cause any casualties. Other than garnering a press release from the US Embassy in Cairo condemning the terrorist attack, there was little noticeable reaction to the attack.²¹⁷

ISIS central, if we can call them that, would like little more than for the MFO to be the target of a spectacular attack. Of the 12 countries that contribute contingents to the MFO, eight have participated to one extent or another in the anti-ISIS coalition currently operating in Iraq and Syria. Wilayat Sinai's decision to target the MFO base, therefore,

²¹⁶ Rahl al-Gharib (GAREB1033). "And knowing that this airport belongs to the Crusader forces for maintaining the security of Jews." June 9, 2015: 3:17pm. Tweet.

²¹⁷ "U.S. Embassy Condemns Terror Attacks," Embassy of the United States Cairo, Egypt, June 11, 2015, <http://egypt.usembassy.gov/pr061115.html>

might be a form of retribution carried out on the periphery of the hostilities taking place in the Levant.

During an attack at a checkpoint on an unspecified date in July, an MFO medical unit was involved in treating 14 other MFO service members who were attacked by militants.²¹⁸ The MFO never acknowledge an attack against it and Wilayat Sinai did not specifically claim targeting the MFO. On July 1st, Wilayat Sinai did launched an unprecedented attack in North Sinai against security forces in and around Sheikh Zuweid in what was an apparent attempt to seize full control of the town (See Chapter 3). The attack ultimately ended with the militants withdrawal from the city but Wilayat Sinai claimed to have launched attacks against more than 21 locations.

In yet another attack against the MFO, two soldiers were wounded when a roadside IED detonated near their armored vehicle as they were conducting supply and recovery convoys on September 3, 2015. A second armored MFO vehicle, responding to the first attack, was also struck by a roadside IED, wounding four American MFO members. All six were evacuated by air to a medical facility with non-life threatening injuries.²¹⁹ Almost certainly, this was an attack specifically targeting the MFO. Had only one MFO vehicle been struck by an IED the attack could have been written off as a wrong-place wrong-time scenario but the fact that a second vehicle was struck while responding suggests the targeting was intentional. The Egyptian government and the MFO likely came to the same conclusion. This attack drew a much more noticeable response. The Egyptian military quickly responded by launching operation “Martyr’s

²¹⁸ “Minnesota medical support team welcomed home from Egypt deployment,” *Star Tribune*, August 29, 2015, <http://www.startribune.com/minnesota-medical-support-team-welcomed-home-from-egypt-deployment/323334351/>

²¹⁹ Lamothe, Dan. “Four U.S. troops, two international peacekeepers wounded in Sinai blasts,” *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/09/04/four-u-s-troops-two-international-peacekeepers-wounded-in-sinai-blasts/>

Right” and on September 6 the MFO announced it had removed its personnel from a remote checkpoint in North Sinai as a result of its inability to safely resupply the site.²²⁰

It was likely this remote site that the first armored vehicle was conducting its supply and recovery convoy to when it was targeted, forcing the closure of the checkpoint. Notably, neither this attack nor the previous attack on the MFO soldiers in July were ever claimed by Wilayat Sinai, but almost undoubtedly it is the perpetrator of these attacks.

This recent string of attacks against the MFO is extremely concerning and may be a portent of things to come. With the array of advanced weapons that Wilayat Sinai now possesses, its proven capability of constructing effective VBIEDs, and an increase in its strength numbers, a large complex attack against the MFO North Camp cannot be overlooked.

²²⁰ “Removal of MFO Personnel from Checkpoint 1-F,” Multinational Force and Observers, accessed September 14, 2015, <http://mfo.org/en/news/37>

CONCLUSION

Terrorism in Egypt has steadily increased since the revolution in early 2011 with a major uptick in the fall of 2013 and throughout 2015. Although Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) was already entrenched in Egypt's Sinai since 2011, the militant group's capabilities and lethality increased significantly in the year since pledging allegiance to ISIS and rebranding itself as Wilayat Sinai, in accordance with ISIS' naming conventions. Wilayat Sinai's enhanced combat tactics, procurement of advanced weaponry, and growing strength threatens the stability of the Egyptian state and risks embroiling Egypt in a long and deadly insurgency.

Egypt has attempted to contain the militancy to the northeastern corner of the Sinai Peninsula in hopes of limiting the effects of this wave of deadly terror. ISIS has, however, been able to expand its operations onto the mainland, separate from Wilayat Sinai, despite the Egyptian military's efforts. In July 2015, a VBIED targeted the Italian Consulate and the following month a SVBIED targeted a State Security building, both of which were in Cairo.^{221 222} ISIS immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks but neither statement named Wilayat Sinai, rather listing only Islamic State in the claims. The absence of Wilayat Sinai from the claims suggests there is a separate and distinct cell operating in the Greater Cairo area. The consulate bombing is particularly concerning because it was the first indication of a shift of ISIS' target sets in Egypt to include Western nationals and government interests.

²²¹ Rahl al-Gharib (GAREB_1077). "Detonating a car bomb on the Italian Consulate in Downtown Cairo." July 11, 2015. 11:41am. Tweet.

²²² Al-Gharib (GAREB103). "In revenge for the martyrs of the epic Arab Sharkas: Targeting a Egyptian apostate security services building in the heart of Cairo with a car bomb." August 20, 2015. 3:27am. Tweet.

Shortly after the bombing of the Italian Consulate, Tomislav Salopek, a Croatian national working for a French oil company in Egypt, was abducted in Cairo and beheaded by Wilayat Sinai militants.²²³ The abduction took place with little media coverage outside of Egypt but Wilayat Sinai maximized its media coverage by releasing a video threatening Salopek's life two weeks later on August 5, 2015, on the eve of Egypt's long awaited opening ceremony of the New Suez Canal expansion.²²⁴ Hundreds of foreign dignitaries were scheduled to attend the celebration, including French President Francois Hollande, guaranteeing the terrorist group would get wide coverage with its threat to a Western hostage.²²⁵

Reading from prepared remarks in English, Salopek issued an ultimatum to the Egyptian government on behalf of Wilayat Sinai. If all imprisoned Muslim women in Egypt were not released within 48 hours he would be killed. To increase the suspense, the group created a webpage with a live countdown to the 48-hour deadline.²²⁶ The new Suez Canal ceremony came and went and so to the 48-hour deadline. After leaving several days for speculation as to the fate of the Croatian captive following the expiration of the deadline, on August 12, the militant group published a gruesome photo of Salopek, confirming that he was beheaded and linking his death to Croatia's support for the US-led anti-ISIS coalition in Iraq and Syria.²²⁷ For as much media attention as the beheading of a

²²³ Almoqatel (PALJ103). "The killing of the Croatian captive for the participation of his country in the war on the Islamic State," [in Arabic] Photo Included. August 12, 2015: 6:46am. Tweet.

²²⁴ "A Message to the Egyptian Government." Wilayat Sinai. Archive.org. 5 Aug. 2015. <<http://archive.org/details/senai-message>>.

²²⁵ The Cairo Post. "Delegations from 121 states to attend New Suez Canal opening: source." *The Cairo Post*. 4 Aug. 2015. <<http://thecairopost.youm7.com/news/162614/news/delegations-from-121-states-to-attend-new-suez-canal-opening-source>>.

²²⁶ "Are We There Yet: A Message to the Egyptian Government." Wilayat Sinai. arewethere.yt. 6 Aug. 2015. <<http://arewethere.yt/A-MESSAGE-TO-THE-EGYPTIAN-GOVERNMENT/26920.htm>>.

²²⁷ Almoqatel (PALJ103). "The killing of the Croatian captive for the participation of his country in the war on the Islamic State," [in Arabic] Photo Included. August 12, 2015: 6:46am. Tweet.

Western captive garnered for the group, it was dwarfed by the group's next attack targeting Western civilians in Egypt.

On the morning of October 31, 2015, Russian Metrojet Flight 9268 took off from Sharm al-Sheikh airport in South Sinai with 224 people, overwhelmingly Russian tourists, onboard heading for St. Petersburg, Russia. Shortly after reaching its cruising altitude of 32,000 feet, the plane suddenly began to plummet towards the ground as it broke apart killing all 224 civilians onboard.²²⁸ Wilayat Sinai was quick to claim responsibility for the attack²²⁹ and the Egyptian and Russian authorities were equally quick to dismiss the claim as implausible.²³⁰

On November 4, the terrorist group double-downed on its claim by issuing an audio statement challenging investigators to prove it wasn't them that brought down the plane.²³¹ That same day, British authorities announced that they were cancelling flights to Sharm al-Sheikh as new evidence suggests the plane may very well have been brought down by an explosive device.²³² The United States quickly joined Britain in claiming that it was likely a bomb that caused the plane to break apart in flight.²³³ Russia soon changed course and on November 17 officially stated that a bomb, estimated to contain up to 1

²²⁸ Zraick, Karen, Karen Yourish, Tim Wallace, Joe Burgess, and Larry Buchanan. "What We Know and Don't Know About the Russian Plane Crash." *The New York Times*. 2 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/02/world/middleeast/investigating-russian-plane-crash.html>>.

²²⁹ Abu Suhiab Al-Ansari (wsiinaa). "Downing a Russian airplane and killing more than 220 Russians who were onboard it." [in Arabic] 31 Oct. 2015: 9:54am. Tweet.

²³⁰ "Egypt Denies ISIS Responsible for Downing Russian Plane in Sinai." *Egyptian Streets*. 31 Oct. 2015. <<http://egyptianstreets.com/2015/10/31/egypt-denies-isis-responsible-for-downing-russian-plane-in-sinai-2/>>.

²³¹ "We are who downed [the plane] so die in your rage." [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai. Archive.org. 4 Nov. 2015. <https://archive.org/details/utfly_list>.

²³² "Sinai plane crash: UK flight from Sharm el-Sheikh." The Prime Minister's official spokesperson. Gov.uk. 4 Nov. 2015. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sinai-plane-crash-uk-flights-from-sharm-el-sheikh>>.

²³³ Roth, Andrew and Griff Witte. "Obama: 'There is a possibility' bomb was aboard Russian jet." *The Washington Post*. 5 Nov. 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russia-and-egypt-brush-off-british-suggestion-that-bomb-caused-plane-to-crash/2015/11/05/948df81c-834a-11e5-8bd2-680fff868306_story.html>.

kilogram (2.2 pounds) of explosive material, was responsible for bring down Metrojet Flight 9268 in the Sinai.²³⁴

ISIS published the 12th issue of its magazine *Dabiq* on November 18, 2015 and included a photo of what it claimed was the explosive device that brought down the Russian airliner.²³⁵ Pictured was a Schweppes soda can, apparently filled with explosives, along with what appeared to be a detonator and a switch. The investigation is still ongoing as this thesis goes to print but there is little doubt remaining that Wilayat Sinai was indeed responsible for downing Metrojet Flight 9268 and killing its 224 passengers.

The bombing of a commercial airliner in Egypt is a significant blow to the Egyptian government and is already having a major impact on Egypt's tourist industry. Both Britain and Russia have evacuated thousands of citizens vacationing in Egypt following the plane bombing, with Russia evacuating some 80,000 of its citizens. The winter holiday months are typically the most popular time for tourists to vacation in Egypt and particularly to the coastal resort towns in South Sinai, like Sharm al-Sheikh. Egypt's Minister of Tourism Hisham Zazou estimates that Egypt will lose about \$800 million in tourism revenue in the next three months.²³⁶

Attacks such as these, which target civilian foreign nationals, could be just as destabilizing for Egypt as wide spread attacks against Coptic Christians and could put the lives of US citizens at risk similar to the that posed to US soldiers working with the MFO.

²³⁴ The Kremlin. "Meeting on investigation into the crash of a Russian airliner over Sinai." President of Russia. 17 Nov. 2015. <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50707>>.

²³⁵ "Just Terror." *Dabiq*. Issue 12. 18 Nov. 2015. <<http://justpaste.it/DABIQ12>>.

²³⁶ Miller, Judith. "Egypt claims it's safe after Russian jet crash, but won't call it terror." *Fox News*. 18 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/11/18/egypt-claims-it-safe-after-russian-jet-crash-but-wont-call-it-terror/>>.

For any of these types of attacks to seriously threaten the stability of the Egyptian government, the crises would need to rise to the level more associated with an insurgency than terrorism. An insurgency is exactly what is taking place in areas of North Sinai currently; however, the situation on the mainland has not reached that level. The viability of such attacks to succeed in a sustained manner is questionable. Like all insurgencies, the insurgents, or terrorists, rely heavily on the cooperation or acquiescence of a sizable portion of the local population. In the Sinai, ISIS' Wilayat Sinai has managed to acquire acquiescence from the local population to a large extent through its brutal intimidation tactics against the civilian population. To date, nothing similar has taken place in the Cairo area, where the majority of mainland attacks have occurred, although there are indications that these could take place in the near future.

In September 2015, ISIS claimed to have beheaded an alleged informant for the Egyptian army in Egypt's Western Desert, the first such killing on mainland Egypt.²³⁷ It is likely that the population in mainland Egypt will turn decisively against the ISIS militants if the group continues to target the tourism industry, much like after the Luxor massacre in 1997. The militants may attempt to preempt this by conducting a widespread intimidation campaign on the mainland, as they have done in North Sinai.

Besides targeting foreign interests, a sustained campaign to target Egypt's Coptic Christians could have major consequences for the stability of the government and country. Wilayat Sinai has not publicly claimed any attacks specifically targeting Christians but it should be considered a possibility for future attacks by ISIS in Egypt.

Unlike its predecessor Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), Wilayat Sinai has conducted few

²³⁷ "Addressing the Campaign of the Apostate Egyptian Army in the Western Desert in Egypt," [in Arabic] ISIS - Egypt, September 13, 2015, <http://s04.justpaste.it/pdf/SA7RAA-justpaste-it-215368.pdf>

attacks on the Egyptian mainland. In fact, since pledging allegiance to ISIS in November 2014 Wilayat Sinai has only claimed three attacks west of the Suez Canal, two of which were small hit-and-run style attacks using small arms fire.²³⁸ The group's constraint to the northeastern sector of the Sinai limits its ability to target Christians. Few Christians live in the Sinai and they are almost non-existent in the northeastern corner where Wilayat Sinai primarily operates. The ISIS cells operating on the mainland are more likely to target Christians simply due to proximity.

Foreign fighters have the potential to hasten any one or all three of the scenarios presented in this thesis. ISIS' front in Egypt is proving to be one of the most successful outside of its key territory in Iraq and Syria. Turkey's decision to join the US-led anti-ISIS coalition in late summer 2015 resulted in a much tighter control of its southern border, increasing the risk to foreign fighters trying to reach Syria or Iraq.²³⁹ Turkey has long been the primary route for foreigners wishing to migrate to Syria or Iraq to join ISIS or al-Qaeda's Syrian branch, Jabhat al-Nusra. Strengthened border security in Turkey could result in an increase of foreign fighters flocking to other fronts such as Egypt where they could then join ISIS affiliates there. The major publicity and world wide media coverage that Wilayat Sinai received due to the Russian airline bombing could help the militant group recruit foreign fighters who see the Sinai based group as one of the most effective fighting groups.

The concern with foreign fighters is that they are less inclined to take local domestic consideration into account in conducting operations. Indeed, the reason that

²³⁸ "Harvest of Military Operations for the Month of Safar," [in Arabic] Wilayat Sinai, Justpaste.it, December 27, 2014, <http://justpaste.it/7SAD-SAFR>

²³⁹ Coskun, Orhan. "Drones and ditches as Turkey tightens border after Islamic State bombing," Reuters, July 23, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/23/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-idUSKCN0PX15J20150723#1j69JRxb0jB9JTf8.97>

Wilayat Sinai has not launch full-scale attacks against the Multinational Force & Observers (MFO) in the Sinai is likely due to pragmatism, believing that it may alienate the local population which it relies on (See chapter 5). Foreign fighters would not likely know the intricacies of how such an attack may affect its ability to operate or recruit among the local population in the future. At a minimum, even if aware of local intricacies, foreigners, seemingly, tend to be less risk-averse. Therefore, they are often more willing to take chances that locals fighters would not; after all, it is not their government, communities, neighborhoods, or fellow citizens they are attacking. With few ties in the foreign country they can pose a problem for intelligence services of the host country, which may have difficulty in locating and keeping track of the foreigners after their arrival. Even a small number of foreign fighters in Egypt could significantly escalate the current conflict; so far, however, few if any foreigners are thought to be operating in Egypt.

To effectively combat these potential scenarios, Egypt needs to improve its counterinsurgency measures. Currently, the collective punish measures are working in favor of the militants and Egypt's seemingly unwillingness to adapt will only prolong the conflict. Forced evacuations, extensive curfews, home demolitions, mass arrests, indiscriminate bombings and shootings, and a lack of transparency add to grievances already present among many in North Sinai. Egypt needs to work to better integrate the North Sinai Bedouin into Egyptian society, improve their economic opportunities, and provide security for the civilian population while reducing any collateral damage while conducting targeted operations against known militants. Until and unless this whole array

of measures is addressed, the militants will continue to gain recruits and increase its reach posing major threats to the Egyptian government.

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APPENDIX: NOTE ON SOURCES

The research for this thesis was conducted over 15 months using extensive amounts of primary source material gathered in its original Arabic language. The primary source material includes official statements, videos, photos, and tweets issued by terrorist groups and individuals in Egypt and across the Middle East. Many of these primary sources have since been deleted from its original online location but I have saved copies of nearly all primary source material cited in this thesis and the copies are available for viewing upon request. Additional primary source material comes from the Egyptian, Israeli, and US governments as well as the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO). Use of secondary source material was scrutinized for accuracy and checked against multiple reports in an effort to maintain the integrity of this thesis. In a few instances, secondary sources could not be corroborated by other accounts but were included only to show two opposing views of an event or situation.