

**A Resurgent Military v/s An Insurgent Islamism:  
A Situational Analysis of Today's Egypt**

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**Office of Islamists: Jimmy Matar**

The 2011 uprising in Egypt which was successful in overthrowing Mubarak gave hope that Egypt is on the correct track towards becoming a democracy; however, the increased authoritarianism of former President Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood and the subsequent military coup reshuffled the cards. This paper aims to shed light on the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, the role of the Salafist groups before and after the 2011 uprising and the 2013 coup, the relationship between the Brotherhood and Salafists, the ongoing insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula and the reaction of the regime, the relationship between Wilayat Sinai and Hamas, and the possible spread of the insurgency into mainland Egypt. The purpose of this research is to see whether the Islamist movement can survive the regime crackdown on one hand and the radicalization threat on the other hand while assessing the possibility of success of the military campaign in the Sinai Peninsula.

The *Brotherhood* survived decades of oppression and did not resort to widespread violence barring minor incidents. They rather focused on participating in the system and aiming at gradual reform. After being heavily oppressed under Abdel Nasser, Sadat allowed them to reemerge in the 1970s while Mubarak allowed its members to run for elections on lists of legal political parties in spite of the Brotherhood being banned as an organization. This allowed them to operate within increasing and decreasing limits based on the relationship with the regime. For example, the Brotherhood was able to win 20% of the seats in the lower house of parliament in the 2005 elections while between 2006 and 2011 senior leaders were imprisoned and the group was not allowed to participate in elections.<sup>1</sup> In late 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood was declared a terrorist organization by the military-led government in Egypt after a car bomb outside a government security building in Mansoura which led to the deaths of at least 15 people<sup>2</sup>. This puts the members of the organization at risk of prosecution and imprisonment while also damaging their networks of clinics, school, and other social services that many poor Egyptians rely upon. These government actions have led the Muslim Brotherhood to reestablish a clandestine infrastructure to be able to survive this crackdown, as they have done over the past

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, N (2015) Unprecedented Pressures Uncharted Course for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/07/29/unprecedented-pressures-uncharted-course-for-egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood/ie2g>

<sup>2</sup> Byman, D (2014) Now That the Muslim Brotherhood is Declared a Terrorist Group It Just Might Become One, Washington Post, Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/now-that-the-muslim-brotherhood-is-declared-a-terrorist-group-it-just-might-become-one/2014/01/10/268977d2-77d6-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/now-that-the-muslim-brotherhood-is-declared-a-terrorist-group-it-just-might-become-one/2014/01/10/268977d2-77d6-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6_story.html)

decades. Historically, the Brotherhood is known for its discipline and focused on civic activism when they were sidelined from politics; however, the organization's assets have now been seized, and it has been banned completely. These brutal actions may drive some of the members to terrorism since they now believe that violence is the only way to advance the Islamic project especially after the military forced out the Muslim Brotherhood's democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi. Despite the plummeting popularity of the Brotherhood at the time of Morsi's ouster due to a failing economy and increased authoritarianism, the committed members in the organization number in the millions<sup>3</sup> which is a significant part of the population that is being alienated by these policies. Even if the Brotherhood's leadership commits to staying peaceful, groups from the organization might act on their own as they have done before through attacking government institutions and the Copt population. The discipline of the members of the organization is being challenged by the tough circumstances that Islamists are passing through. Not to mention that terrorist groups are actively seeking to recruit Brotherhood members into their ranks.<sup>4</sup>

According to the analysis of Ayyash, the Muslim Brotherhood has been engaged in recent months in an internal debate about the possibility of using violence to counter the oppression they are facing at the hands of the security forces. Even though some members resorted to violence after the coup which ousted Morsi, it was never a formal decision by the organization; however, the Rabaa massacre and the increasing state repression has rekindled the question. Due to the fears of defections from the Brotherhood's members to more radical groups and the rising demands of the youth members to use "smart violence", there has been more leniency by the party elites towards such propositions by justifying the use of limited violence; however, this does not indicate a change in the strategy adopted by the group. What is meant by smart violence is targeting specific elements of the regime rather than the indiscriminate approach used by radical groups. There is an increasing divide among the elites and members of the Brotherhood between those supportive of violence and those who want to retain the long-adopted pacifist

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<sup>3</sup> Byman, D (2014) Now That the Muslim Brotherhood is Declared a Terrorist Group It Just Might Become One, Washington Post, Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/now-that-the-muslim-brotherhood-is-declared-a-terrorist-group-it-just-might-become-one/2014/01/10/268977d2-77d6-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/now-that-the-muslim-brotherhood-is-declared-a-terrorist-group-it-just-might-become-one/2014/01/10/268977d2-77d6-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6_story.html)

<sup>4</sup> Byman, D (2014) Now That the Muslim Brotherhood is Declared a Terrorist Group It Just Might Become One, Washington Post, Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/now-that-the-muslim-brotherhood-is-declared-a-terrorist-group-it-just-might-become-one/2014/01/10/268977d2-77d6-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/now-that-the-muslim-brotherhood-is-declared-a-terrorist-group-it-just-might-become-one/2014/01/10/268977d2-77d6-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6_story.html)

approach; however, it is clear that there is a rise in the Salafist-jihadist discourse among the Brotherhood members on social media especially after the successes of the Islamic State and Ansar Bayt Al Maqdis and the inability of the state to eliminate these groups. Some members have even begun organizing themselves to launch attacks against security and military forces.<sup>5</sup>

*Salafism* in Egypt appeared during the Islamic Awakening in the 1970s which aimed at reviving the essential role of Islam in life based on a scripturalist approach. These activities took different forms such as education, charity, media, and social work. The different sub-schools range from focusing on religious education, rejecting political involvement, engaging in charity work, aiming for gradual political change, and waging jihad. After the 2011 uprising, they were divided into three categories: unorganized Salafists who supported the Muslim Brotherhood, an organized Salafist party competing with the Brotherhood, and radical revolutionary Islamist youths who did not join formal organizations and engaged in actions ranging from violent jihad to protest politics. A Salafist party was founded called Nour Party which is the political wing of the most powerful Salafist group in Egypt over the past decades, Al Dawa Al Salafiyya association in Alexandria. The association was allowed to function under the Mubarak regime during the 1980s and early 1990s since it countered the jihadist influence, but a crackdown was done in 1994 for security reasons which forced the association to move underground in order to survive. Forming an official party showed a shift in from abstaining from politics to being politically involved which was now considered religiously justifiable and more feasible since their social work has to be translated into an Islamization of laws which cannot occur except through political engagement. This showed an attempt to replicate the structure of the Muslim Brotherhood by the Salafists but failed to do so due to weak networking, logistics, and finances... while also diverting away from the main focus of scholarly production. Even though democratic instruments are adopted by the Salafist party to reach that goal, their aim is to change the status quo to be more conforming with the ruling of pious Muslim predecessors.<sup>6</sup>

Salafists disagree with the Brotherhood in terms of religious doctrine, approach, and political ideology such as accepting democracy and gender equality in several countries and the fact that

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<sup>5</sup> Ayyash, A (2015) The Brotherhood's Post-Pacifist Approach, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=60665>

<sup>6</sup> El Sherif, A (2015) Egypt's Salafists at a Crossroads, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/29/egypt-s-salafists-at-crossroads/i831>

their relations with Copts and Shiites are not based on Sharia. Many Salafists state that they turned to Salafism after the Brotherhood abandoned its spiritual ideology in favor of becoming a social and political organization. This dates back to the 1970s and 1980s when both competed in attracting the public through mosques, universities, and charity organizations. This turned violent in 1980 when Brotherhood members tried to prevent Salafists from spreading their ideology in Alexandria University, and the relationship was never mended since.<sup>7</sup>

Limited cooperation was done between the two groups during and after the ouster of Mubarak, but Morsi's dismissal of Khaled Alam Eldin, one of his advisors who belonged to the Nour party, under allegations of corruption and abuse of power reignited the underlying tensions.<sup>8</sup> Even before this incident, accusations of bribery and forgery were exchanged after disagreements over seats allocation during the 2011-2012 elections.<sup>9</sup> This was due to the Nour party attempting to limit the Brotherhood's grasp on power which in return undermined the Salafists' political weight and tried to deflate their political rise; moreover, during Morsi's Presidency, both aimed at limiting the political power of the other.<sup>10</sup> They cooperated together in order to be able to pass the constitution with Sharia clauses, but the Nour Party weighed its options and was already preparing to jump ship through starting to present itself as a moderate substitute to the Brotherhood.<sup>11</sup> The Nour Party and the Brotherhood reached the breaking point in their already tense relationship when the Salafists refused to join the Brotherhood's protests supporting Morsi against the military coup and endorsed the roadmap which ousted him from power. This decision came as shock to Brotherhood supporters and many Salafists as well due to shared general goals between both parties such as imposing Sharia law and rejecting secularism.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Al Anani, K (2013) The Salafi Brotherhood Feud in Egypt, Al Monitor, Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/muslim-brotherhood-salafist-feud-in-egypt.html#>

<sup>8</sup> Al Anani, K (2013) The Salafi Brotherhood Feud in Egypt, Al Monitor, Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/muslim-brotherhood-salafist-feud-in-egypt.html#>

<sup>9</sup> Tarek, S (2015) Nour Party Egypt's Political Islam Sole Survivor Left with Dim Election Hopes, Ahram Online, Retrieved from <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/141690/Egypt/Politics-/Nour-Party.-Egypts-political-Islam-sole-survivor,-.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> Al Anani, K (2013) The Salafi Brotherhood Feud in Egypt, Al Monitor, Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/muslim-brotherhood-salafist-feud-in-egypt.html#>

<sup>11</sup> Mekkawi, N (2013) A Love Hate Relationship Al Nour and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Al Arabiya, Retrieved from <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/alarabiya-studies/2013/08/22/A-love-hate-relationship-Al-Nour-and-Egypt-s-Muslim-Brotherhood.html>

<sup>12</sup> Tarek, S (2015) Nour Party Egypt's Political Islam Sole Survivor Left with Dim Election Hopes, Ahram Online, Retrieved from <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/141690/Egypt/Politics-/Nour-Party.-Egypts-political-Islam-sole-survivor,-.aspx>

After the coup in 2013, the formal Salafist organizations accepted being co-opted by the state in order to remain existent, but this greatly damaged their credibility while unorganized Salafists stood by the Brotherhood. The Noor Party's current strategy aims at finding a way to politically participate in an authoritarian regime amid an anti-Islamic sentiment while also regaining their credibility. They believe that Morsi's rule was not Islamic and does not deserve fighting for while preserving an Islamic party under the new rule will strengthen its bid to someday succeed the Brotherhood. They currently accept the Sisi regime while voicing criticisms at specific issues such as the suppression of Islamists and limiting the freedom of religious preaching in mosques. What is certain is that they have lost the sympathy of many of the general Salafist masses, and the upcoming parliamentary elections will determine the remaining support they still have. Even internally, an internal opinion poll conducted by the party estimated that 60 percent of the members disagree with the latest decisions being taken especially regarding the ouster of Morsi.<sup>13</sup>

Sisi is also bringing in the religious establishment to his side in the crackdown on Islamists in general and Sinai jihadists in particular. This was seen with banning unauthorized preacher and providing instructions for the sermons. He even gave a speech at Al Azhar which was seen as a plea for moderation, and the mufti aims at sending a message of peaceful interpretation of Islam; however, the mufti has been reluctant to show avid support for the regime. This is not the case with the Minister of Religious Endowment who mobilized the religious establishments in a way not seen for decades. Even the religious curriculum of Al Azhar is being changed based on the recommendations of Sisi mainly targeting the issue of militancy.<sup>14</sup>

The severe crackdown and repression practiced since the ouster of Morsi has clearly not brought stability since Egypt is more under threat of terrorist attacks than it ever was before. From the violent dispersion of the two pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo that claimed at least 800 lives to the arrests of tens of thousands since the coup to the hundreds that have "disappeared", the level of repression is unprecedented and has targeted Islamists as well as liberal and secular opposition activists. Studies have shown that there is a direct link between tyranny and terror, as pointed out

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<sup>13</sup> El Sherif, A (2015) Egypt's Salafists at a Crossroads, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/29/egypt-s-salafists-at-crossroads/i831>

<sup>14</sup> Awad, M (2015) Mutual Escalation in Egypt, Washington Post, Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/02/09/mutual-escalation-in-egypt/>

in the 2003 study done by Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova<sup>15</sup>. These high levels of oppression in Egypt have directly benefited the Islamic State and Al Qaeda especially in terms of their arguments which stated that peaceful participation in elections and attempting to change the system gradually from the inside as adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood does not work while violence does as seen with the rise of the Islamic State which succeeded in governance as well, an advantage which the Brotherhood previously held over Al Qaeda. As a result, violent attacks rose sharply after the coup from an average of 3.4 attacks per month to 53.2 attacks per month<sup>16</sup>. This was exacerbated by the rise of the Islamic State's international position and the flow of arms from Libya; however, the direct rise in attacks is more related to good timing rather than recruitment which requires more time. The good timing is mainly related to the Egyptian military being occupied with controlling the major urban centers while cracking down on the Brotherhood; in addition to the jihadist groups wanting to capitalize on the Islamist anger after the coup.<sup>17</sup>

The unrest in the *Sinai* region is not a new issue. It dates back to the Taba and Nuweiba bombings in 2004. These attacks prompted a crackdown by the security forces in North Sinai which led to the arrest of about 3,000 people which included women and children related to the suspects as hostages until the suspects surrendered. The detained were brutally tortured, and many vowed revenge.<sup>18</sup>

Another wave of bombings occurred in Sharm El Sheikh in 2005 to which Al Tawhid Wal Jihad took responsibility. The group's members were locals who were influenced by Zarqawi's organization in Iraq. The founder was Khaled Musaid who was killed in September 2005 by the security forces, but he was able to transform an ideology into a real organizational structure with multiple cells in several regions. After his death, several offshoots emerged from the group. The largest offshoot aimed at preaching Salafism and engaging in social work such as Ahel Al Sunna Wal Jamaa and other smaller organizations. A second offshoot focused on paramilitary training

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<sup>15</sup> Krueger, A & Maleckova, J (2003) Seeking the Roots of Terrorism, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Seeking-the-Roots-of-Terrorism/27185>

<sup>16</sup> Hamid, S (2015) Sisi's Regime is a Gift to the Islamic State, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/06/sisi-is-the-best-gift-the-islamic-state-ever-got/>

<sup>17</sup> Hamid, S (2015) Sisi's Regime is a Gift to the Islamic State, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/06/sisi-is-the-best-gift-the-islamic-state-ever-got/>

<sup>18</sup> Ashour, O (2012) Jihadists and Post-Jihadists in the Sinai, Brookings, Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/09/05-jihadism-sinai-ashour>

but did not engage in any attacks while a third offshoot did both the training and armed operations such as *Majlis Shura Al Mujahidin Fi Aknaf Bayt Al Maqdis* which mainly focused on Israeli targets. A second crackdown followed the 2005 attacks, and the detainees were mainly distributed in five prisons. A large part of the jihadists were de-radicalized by former jihadist leaders and independent Salafist figures through lessons in jurisprudence and creed. These attempts to convince the youths to abandon armed jihad were also set up on a local level such as the Legitimate Committee for Conflict Resolution in North Sinai and the Al Nour Party which organized lectures about countering Jihadism.<sup>19</sup>

*Ansar Bayt Al Maqdis* is the leading militant group in the ongoing insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula which emerged after the 2011 uprising with attacks targeting Israeli interests and shifted its activities towards the Egyptian heartland after the coup which ousted Morsi. The group was rebranded as Wilayat Sinai after it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. This decision came after deep internal disputes regarding whether the group should remain independent to gain more local support or join a global jihadist network. The second dispute was joining Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. The veterans in the group preferred Al Qaeda, but the younger members were able to pressure them into joining the latter. There has been speculation that insiders within the military have leaked information to the group regarding army deployments<sup>20</sup>; in addition, it exploited the distrust between the economically neglected Sinai population and the Egyptian government. This was clear in the electoral results from 2011 to 2014 where South Sinai is more supportive of the regime due to its reliance on the tourism industry while North Sinai has supported the Islamist candidates at a significantly higher rate than the national average (61.5% voted for Morsi compared to 51.7 percent). The group is very familiar with these tensions since many of its founders are from Northern Sinai.<sup>21</sup>

Even before the group declared allegiance to the Islamic State in November 2014, the focus of their attacks was security and military forces under the cover of revenge for the oppression of

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<sup>19</sup> Ashour, O (2012) Jihadists and Post-Jihadists in the Sinai, Brookings, Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/09/05-jihadism-sinai-ashour>

<sup>20</sup> Al Anani, K (2014) ISIS Enters Egypt, Foreign Affairs, Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-12-04/isis-enters-egypt>

<sup>21</sup> Hamid, S (2015) Sisi's Regime is a Gift to the Islamic State, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/06/sisi-is-the-best-gift-the-islamic-state-ever-got/>



Islamists.<sup>22</sup> In 2015, the focus of the attacks shifted towards civilian targets as well. For example, in January 2015, there were 36 attacks on civilian targets which are higher than all the attacks on civilians in the past year. This could be due to the attempt of the group to subdue the local population and challenge the local power structures; however, this has increased tensions with the local tribes which have recently been more supportive of the military. A full-on tribal war against Wilayat Sinai is very difficult due to the inability to unite the different tribes because of the ethnic divisions between them and the threat posed to those who call for confronting the group as seen with previous assassinations.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, the harsh policy adopted by the military has been somehow successful in preventing the spread of the attacks into the urban centers, but it has alienated the Sinai population. For example, the establishment of the buffer zone in the Sinai Peninsula led to the forced eviction of up to 10,000 residents, and the scorched-earth tactics of the army have destroyed large parts of North Sinai civilization. A resident in the border town of Rafah stated that he is more afraid of the army than the jihadists and added that whoever fights the oppressor will get sympathy from the local population. Another resident in Sinai stated that after 90% of his village was destroyed in the security campaign, approximately 40 people took up arms compared to only five in 2013.<sup>24</sup> This increased public anger by the Sinai residents towards the policy of the Egyptian government and army, along with the improved sophistication of the weapons and attacks done by Wilayat Sinai indicate the possibility of the group aiming to control territory in Northern Sinai from which it can expand the Caliphate of the Islamic State, administer governance, obtain freedom of movement, and prepare for future military operations.<sup>25</sup> An attempt to achieve this was done in July 2015 where a highly planned wave of attacks were launched against the Egyptian forces deployed in the Sheikh Zuweid city, and

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<sup>22</sup> Hamid, S (2015) Sisi's Regime is a Gift to the Islamic State, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/06/sisi-is-the-best-gift-the-islamic-state-ever-got/>

<sup>23</sup> Sinai Correspondent (2015) Are Tribes in Sinai Really Unifying Against Terrorism, Al Monitor, Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/egypt-sinai-tribes-war-terrorism-army.html#>

<sup>24</sup> Gold, Z (2015) North Sinai Population Continues to Sacrifice for Egypt, The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, Retrieved from <http://timep.org/commentary/north-sinai-population-continues-to-sacrifice-for-egypt/>; TIMEP (2015) Assault in Sheikh Zuweid A Turning Point in Egypt's Fight Against Terrorism, The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, Retrieved from <http://timep.org/commentary/assault-in-sheikh-zuweid-a-turning-point-in-egypts-fight-against-terrorism/>

<sup>25</sup> Faruki, Y (2015) ISIS's Wilayat Sinai Launches Largest Offensive in Sheikh Zuweid, Institute for the Study of War, Retrieved from <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/isis%E2%80%99s-wilayat-sinai-launches-largest-offensive-sheikh-zuweid>

Wilayat Sinani was able to control it for about 10 hours before being forced out by the heavy bombing of the Egyptian air force.<sup>26</sup> This shift in tactics from hit and run attacks to controlling territory reflect the adoption of the tactics employed by the core Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria; in addition, the sophistication and complexity of the attack indicates the presence of fighters who previously fought in Syria and Iraq or foreigners with ground experience in shaping the battle plan of the Islamic State.<sup>27</sup>

It was announced on September 23, 2015 by the Egyptian military that the campaign is being scaled down after a 16-day operation successfully destroyed the hideouts and equipment of the group with future goals being exerting full direct control over the North Sinai towns of El Arish, Sheikh Zuweid, and Rafah; however, the degree of crippling the operability of Wilayat Sinai is still unknown.<sup>28</sup> Most of the focus has been on the Sinai Peninsula, and an attempt to expand into mainland Egypt could be done through the spread of jihadist cells in different areas, allying with other groups, or guiding the establishment of a new wilaya altogether.<sup>29</sup> Egypt is also a crucial area for the Islamic State in its ambitions to gain further legitimacy since the Sinai Peninsula can be used as a launching pad for attacks against Israel.<sup>30</sup>

*Ham*as has denied through its leaders (Ismail Haniyeh, Mousa Abu Marzouk, and Abu Obeida) any connection to Wilayat Sinai and referred to the arrests of Salafists made after the firing of rockets into Israel; in addition, Abu Marzouk stated that Hamas has no interest in cooperating with the Sinai organization and added that the attacks on the border with Egypt disrupt the security of the Palestinians, especially those living in Gaza who would greatly benefit from the opening of the Rafah crossing. On the other hand, Israeli Major General Yoav Mordechai stated that intelligence information indicates Hamas supports Wilayat Sinai and provides it with weapons; moreover, he mentioned that Izz Al Din Al Qassam Brigades has close ties to the

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<sup>26</sup> Sinai Correspondent (2015) Wilayat Sinai Fails to Cripple Egyptian Army, Al Monitor, Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/egypt-sheikh-zuweid-wilayat-sinai-attack-egyptian-army.html#>

<sup>27</sup> Stratfor Analysis (2015) For Egypt Islamic State One Threat Among Many, Stratfor, Retrieved from <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/egypt-islamic-state-one-threat-among-many>

<sup>28</sup> AFP (2015) Egypt Military Winds Down Sinai Campaign Against ISIS, Al Arabiya, Retrieved from <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/09/23/Egypt-military-winds-down-Sinai-campaign-against-ISIS.html>

<sup>29</sup> Gambhir, H (2015) ISIS's Wilayat Sinai Attacks International Base, Institute for the Study of War, Retrieved from <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/isis%E2%80%99s-wilayat-sinai-attacks-international-base>

<sup>30</sup> Al Anani, K (2014) ISIS Enters Egypt, Foreign Affairs, Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-12-04/isis-enters-egypt>

group, and a commander from the Brigades aided injured fighters from the group by transporting them to hospitals in Gaza. This was confirmed by Rafah residents who saw members of Al Qassam Brigades bringing wounded fighters from Northern Sinai to hospitals with select medical staff, but they also stated that this is a humanitarian act rather than showing support for one side or another in the Sinai conflict. Sisi has not yet accused Hamas of supporting Wilayat Sinai, but he didn't clear them from responsibility as well. The presence of a relationship between Hamas's military wing and Wilayat Sinai is confirmed by a senior Palestinian Authority security figure who stated that the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, Israeli intelligence, and Egyptian intelligence all have well-founded evidence of the cooperation between both groups, including the names of those involved. This cooperation goes back to the smuggling operations between Hamas and anyone in the Sinai Peninsula willing to help before Israel's disengagement from Gaza in 2005 and later on during the siege of the Gaza Strip. This increased after the ouster of Morsi, and the sealing of the smuggling tunnels along with the establishment of the buffer zone by the Egyptian military. This changed the view of the Egyptian army by Hamas to an enemy that must be weakened in Sinai which led to a complex and mutually beneficial relationship between Al Qassam Brigades and the armed groups in Sinai including Wilayat Sinai.<sup>31</sup> It is believed that this cooperation was previously encouraged by the political wing of Hamas during the siege of Gaza but is now opposed to it since it's endangering the recently improved relations with the Egyptian regime.<sup>32</sup>

The new anti-terror law adopted in June 2015 is seen as a response to the ongoing insurgency in North Sinai and an effort to provide security; however, it could be easily exploited to crack down on opposition groups and the Muslim Brotherhood due to the broad definition used for terrorism. It can be considered to be a continuation of the repressive environment for political expression and journalism since the overthrow of Morsi.<sup>33</sup> There has been a shift in the nature of repression from a measured approach under the Mubarak regime to a systematic and unrestricted approach under the rule of Sisi. This could be related to a change in the ruling elite especially the dominance of the military over the business elite due to a shift in focus from liberalization and

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<sup>31</sup> Eldar, S (2015) Is Hamas Working with Wilayat Sinai, Al Monitor, Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/israel-gaza-hamas-is-sinai-smuggling-weapons-blockade-egypt.html#>

<sup>32</sup> Times of Israel Staff (2015) Hamas Has Close Ties to IS Affiliates in Sinai Say Israel Egypt, Times of Israel, Retrieved from <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-has-close-ties-to-is-affiliates-in-sinai-say-israel-egypt/>

<sup>33</sup> Brown, N (2015) Egyptian Government Imposes Strict Anti-Terrorism Law, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/08/18/egyptian-government-imposes-strict-anti-terrorism-law/iey4>

economic progress to political stability and fighting terrorism. The power of the private business elite has also been diminished to military-controlled businesses as seen with the huge role that the military played in the building of the new Suez Canal. Even the judiciary is heavily influenced by the military unlike the relative degree of independence it had during the Mubarak regime such as the role some reformist judges played against the regime during the 2005 elections.<sup>34</sup>

The expansion of the scope of attacks from Northern Sinai to mainland Egypt such as the bombing of the Italian consulate in Cairo on July 11, 2015 and the car bomb which killed Hisham Barakat, Egypt's prosecutor general on July 29, 2015 indicate that an increase in the sophistication of the coordination in planning and technical capacities<sup>35</sup>. All provinces in Egypt have been hit with attacks especially Greater Cairo and areas along the Nile (provinces of Beni Suef and Fayoum). These attacks are not all attributed to Wilayat Sinai since almost three-quarters of these attacks were not claimed by a group which shows that there are many small jihadist cells operating in Egypt. This is due to, not only the repression and opposition to government policies, but also to the support of global jihadist organizations to local groups regardless of having a main interest in the local politics of the country or not. This has increased the sympathy towards these local groups as an alternative political project or an easy way to obtain revenge. The nature of terrorism and its tactics have changed, but the reply of the Egyptian regime has been the same through campaigns which target terror suspects, journalists, activists, and human rights defenders alike. These tactics have proven to be an unsuccessful measure to follow due to the counter-effect it has on the already marginalized population and due to the transnational nature of today's terrorist groups yet they are still used by the regime to show the population as a whole that something is being done to limit these attacks and preserve stability.<sup>36</sup>

Egypt has gone through several major events in such a short time in the past several years, and it is natural for the regime and the population to seek stability; however, this stability should not

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<sup>34</sup> Mansour, M (2015) Repression in Egypt from Mubarak to Sisi, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=60985>

<sup>35</sup> Okail, N & McManus, A (2015) Egypt's Old Strategy for New Terrorism, Foreign Affairs, Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/egypt/2015-07-21/egypts-old-strategy-new-terrorism>

<sup>36</sup> Okail, N & McManus, A (2015) Egypt's Old Strategy for New Terrorism, Foreign Affairs, Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/egypt/2015-07-21/egypts-old-strategy-new-terrorism>

come at the expense of a significant part of the population and the political rights of the general public. Relying on a heavy-handed military campaign in an effort to defeat the Sinai insurgency will not yield the desired results especially since this alienates the local population which makes them more sympathetic with the armed groups and will not neutralize the operability of Wilayat Sinai due to the support it has from across the border, mainly the military wing of Hamas and the core Islamic State group. Even if temporary stability is achieved, it will not be permanent and will not last long. Furthermore, the severe oppression targeting anything Islamist will no doubt have a counter-effect since this will push the relatively moderate Brotherhood members to joining more radical groups or resorting to violence themselves as seen with the current rift within the Brotherhood with rising calls for the use of violence against government actions. Using the Salafist Nour Party as a cover to limit the Islamist wave of anger has had limited results since its credentials were highly damaged when it did not oppose the coup which ousted Morsi, the “Islamist President”. Simply using brute force will not solve the deep problems facing Egypt, and sooner or later they will start to show not only in Northern Sinai but on a wider level. The government has to show more leniency towards the operations of Islamist groups that aim to be part of the political process and are nonviolent in nature. This would diminish the radicalization threat posed to the moderate Islamist youths since it provides them with a platform to express their opinion and be engaged from politically. Moreover, the military should adopt a more targeted campaign against Wilayat Sinai while taking into consideration the civilian presence in the area because hard power alone cannot resolve the conflict.