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THE SINAI PENINSULA THREAT DEVELOPMENT AND RESPOND CONCEPT

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The Sinai Peninsula Threat Development and Respond Concept

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Introduction

Since the 2004 terrorist attacks in the Sinai Peninsula, the increasing radicalization of the peninsula's Bedouin population has created a growing security challenge for both Egypt and Israel. In the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, the Egyptian police and security forces based in Sinai came under attack from Bedouin militants. To date, the government has failed to effectively reassert authority over the area. The resulting security vacuum has created a fertile environment for Islamist militants to thrive, effectively rendering the Sinai Peninsula a new front in a region rife with conflict. As foreign fighters pour into the Sinai to exploit the deteriorating security situation and create an operational base for the global jihadi movement, Bedouin militants, operating independently and in coordination with Islamist militants affiliated with Al Qa'ida, continue to carry out attacks against Egyptian and Israeli targets. Having obtained semi-autonomous status in the chaos that occurred after the removal of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, they remain reluctant to allow the central government to reassert control over the area, fearing a return to the repressive measures of the Mubarak era. The security situation in the peninsula has deteriorated further in the wake of the coup that removed President Morsi from power in July 2013.

For Israel, having relied on the relative peace and stability along its southern border since the signing of the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, the emerging terror threat in the Sinai has placed the government in a difficult position. In the face of increasing cross-border attacks emanating from the Sinai, Israel has refrained from taking offensive measures on Egyptian soil, so as not to jeopardize the fragile peace. Compounding the threat to Israel, in recent years, Hamas and other Gaza-based Islamist militants, have taken advantage of Israel's restraint and increasingly use the peninsula as an operational platform through which to target Israel, creating operative synergy between Gaza and the Sinai. The growing terrorist threat in the peninsula is forcing the military and intelligence services to reassess

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Israel's security posture and implement a series of new defensive measures and operational strategies to thwart terror attacks emanating from the Sinai.

This paper has five sections. The first section provides an overview of the operational environment, noting the operational constraints on both Egypt and Israel as a result of the 1979 peace agreement. The next sections will examine the Egyptian government's neglect of the peninsula since the Egyptians resumed control over the area in 1982, and the impact these policies have had on the increasing radicalization of the Sinai's Bedouin population. The third section will explore the increasing use of Islamist organizations to exploit the security vacuum in Sinai and the effect that the influx of foreign fighters has had on the indigenous population, as well as the impact on the Egyptian government and Israel. The fourth section will note the impact that the deteriorating security situation in the Sinai has had on both Israel and Egypt. The final section will propose a series of policy recommendations for Egypt, Israel and the international community. These recommendations suggest steps for both Egypt and Israel to implement in developing an operational response adequate to address the escalating terrorist threat in the Sinai. This paper argues that securing the Sinai Peninsula in the long term requires that the government in Cairo, with the assistance of the international community, address the longstanding grievances of the Bedouin. This entails implementing a robust development strategy that will improve the socio-economic status of Sinai's Bedouin population, and ultimately facilitating their inclusion into the fabric of Egyptian society.

The Operational Environment

Nestled between Israel, Gaza, and the Suez Canal, the Sinai Peninsula is approximately 61,000 square kilometers—nearly three times the size of Israel, and historically has been the least developed region in the country. The long-neglected territory is home to more than 300,000 Bedouin, who comprise 70 percent of the population.[6] Of particular note are those tribes located in the north and southeast areas of the peninsula, along the Egypt-Gaza and Egypt-Israel borders. Since the 1990s, their proximity to Israel and Gaza has helped foster a vast smuggling network that increasingly serves as a conduit for the transfer of illicit weapons and terrorist operatives between Sinai and Gaza. The areas of the peninsula that pose the greatest security threat from the growing presence of jihadists and radicalized Bedouin are al-Madeya in the northern Sinai, due to its close proximity to the Israeli border and home to both Rafah and El Arish, and the Jabal Hilal region in central Sinai, which in the past has served as a stronghold for Al Qa'ida operatives in their battle against the Egyptian military. Due to the absence of Egyptian authority in Sinai, al-Madeya is primarily controlled by the Barikat tribe, one of the few Sinai Bedouin tribes with a history of supporting the global jihadist cause.[7]

Following the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982, the Egyptian-Israeli border enjoyed relative quiet, with only the occasional cross-border incident during the Mubarak regime.[8] In recent years, the confluence of deep-seated Bedouin grievances, the presence of Palestinian Islamist

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[6] Nicolas Pelham, "Sinai: The Buffer Erodes," Chatham House, September 2012, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/pr0912pelham.pdf.

[7] Avi Issacharoff, "No Summer Break in the Violent Middle East," *The Times of Israel*, August 23, 2013, http://www.timesofisrael.com/no-summer-break-in-the-violent-middle-east/.

[8] Isabel Kershner, "Suicide Attack Kills One in Israel," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/05/world/worldspecial/05mideast.html?pagewanted =all; Stephen Farrell and Isabel Kershner, "Rockets Hits Resort on Border of Jordan and Israel," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/03/world/middleeast/03israel.html.

groups in the Sinai, and now Al Qa'ida affiliated groups seeking to exploit the security vacuum, has led to an escalation in terror attacks launched from the Sinai into southern Israel. Although precise estimates on the number of militants operating in the Sinai vary, a recent report from Israel's domestic intelligence service, Shin Bet, estimates that since the Egyptian revolution in 2011 the number of Salafi groups affiliated with Al Qa'ida operating in the Sinai has grown to 15, amounting to a significant increase in a relatively short amount of time.[9]

The treaty between Egypt and Israel, signed in 1979, has served to maintain the peace between the two countries for more than thirty years. Pursuant to the terms of the security annex the peninsula is divided into four zones, imposing limits on the presence of military forces in the area. The provisions for Zone C, which corresponds to the eastern half of the peninsula, and thus lies close to the Israeli border, drastically limit the Egyptian military footprint there, while the terms for Zone D, corresponding to a strip of territory in southern Israel, limit the Israeli military presence along the border.[10]

The Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), is an international peacekeeping force deployed in Zone C, tasked with monitoring the implementation of the peace treaty.[11] Since the Egyptian revolution began in 2011, increasing radicalism among the Sinai Bedouin, the proliferation of weapons, and the growing presence of foreign fighters in Sinai has resulted in an escalation of violence in the peninsula, of which the MFO has been a frequent target. The increasing militancy of the Sinai Bedouin, particularly those residing in the northern part of the peninsula, has resulted in the presence of Bedouin gangs along the routes barring the MFO from carrying out routine ground and aerial patrols.[12] The violence in the region has been so intense that at times it has prevented the peacekeeping force from resupplying its bases.[13] In response to the escalating threat, members of the MFO have had to curtail their movements and bolster security around bases, hindering their ability to effectively carry out their mission. The declining influence of the MFO has served as a contributing factor to the state of lawlessness that has existed in Sinai since the fall of the Mubarak regime.[14]

The Sinai Bedouin: Egypt's Fifth Column

In April 1982, Egyptian rule over the Sinai Peninsula was restored following a 15-year Israeli occupation. Between 1967 and 1982 when Israelis controlled the Sinai, they had begun the process of developing what would later prove to be a lucrative tourism industry for Egypt, a process that proceeded in consultation with the local Bedouin population. In addition, during the period of Israeli occupation, a range of social services were provided to the Bedouin. Following the transfer of power back to Egypt, the Mubarak government harbored deep-seated mistrust of the Sinai Bedouin population, regarding them as collaborators with Israel. The Egyptian government's perception of the Bedouin as collaborators was based, in part, on the positive view that many Bedouin

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[9] Barak Ravid, "Shin Bet Forms New Unit to Thwart Attacks on Israel by Sinai Jihadists," *Haaretz*, August 20, 2013, http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.542417.

[10] Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel, March 26, 1979, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-egypt%20peace%20treaty.aspx (24 September 2013).

[11] The Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai, http://mfo.org/sinai (1 August 2013); This part of the essay is based on analysis carried out by the Institute for National Security Studies in 2012 in the course of a simulation enacted to examine Israel-Egypt relations in light of security incidents in the Sinai Peninsula.

[12] Yehuda Balanga, "Sinai: A Territory Without a Master," *Al Monitor*, June 23, 2012, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/security/01/06/trouble-from-the-south.html.

[13] Ehud Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front*," Policy Notes, No. 9, January 2012, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 8, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/sinai-a-new-front.

[14] Ernesto Londono, "In Egypt's Sinai, Rising Militancy Threatens Peacekeeping Force," *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-08-27/world/41492856_1_peacekeeping-force-egypt-and-israel-peace-treaty.

had towards Israel, due to the Israeli treatment of the local population during the occupation.

Under the Mubarak regime, the Bedouin were restricted from serving in the Egyptian military—which in turn excluded them from a host of economic opportunities. Government jobs were not available to the Bedouin, and local communities were often dispossessed of land and ownership rights. Furthermore, Sinai Bedouin were barred from sharing in the lucrative benefits from the Sinai-based tourism and natural resource industries. As well, during this period the Egyptian government implemented a policy intended to alter the demographic balance in the peninsula, and through the use of subsidies and other government benefits, encouraged resettlement of Egyptians in the Nile Valley. This policy was implemented with little regard for the indigenous Bedouin population.[15] The Mubarak government largely neglected the peninsula, though when it did engage in development and construction projects in Sinai, its efforts were primarily intended to develop the tourism industry along the Red Sea coast, or to enhance infrastructure related to the Arab Gas Pipeline in the northern Sinai. The needs of the local population were largely unmet, and these policies fueled the Bedouins' intense resentment of the government.

By the 1990s, unable to share in the windfall from the Sinai-based tourism or natural resource industries, and excluded from other economic opportunities, the Bedouins began to foster an illicit economy, largely dependent on smuggling drugs and other goods into both Israel and Gaza. Eventually, following the Israeli-imposed economic blockade of Gaza in 2007, the Bedouin criminal smuggling enterprise would expand to include trade in illicit weapons and other commodities, utilizing an elaborate network of tunnels located along the border between Egypt and Gaza. The vast criminal enterprise and illicit economy was able to thrive due in part to the inherent corruption of the Egyptian police and security forces, as well as due to characteristics unique to the Bedouin—including the nature of their nomadic lifestyle, close-knit tribal and familial bonds, the clan networks located on both sides of the Egypt-Israel and Egypt-Gaza borders, and their vast knowledge of the desert terrain.

During the initial phase of the development of this black market economy, the various Bedouin tribes maintained largely separate and distinct economic systems. Due to their location along the Egyptian-Gaza border, a number of tribes located in the northern Sinai—including the Tarabeen, Sawarka and Rumaylat—operated the vast network of smuggling tunnels that had been constructed along the border with Gaza, while along the southern half of the Egypt-Israel border, other local tribes dominated the cross-border trade in commodities, illicit drugs and human trafficking.[16] In 2011, the black market economy in the Sinai was estimated at more than $300 million, and it continues to serve as a main source of income for the Sinai Bedouin.[17]

The Radicalization of the Sinai Bedouin

Decades of discriminatory policies, economic marginalization and repressive measures carried out by the Mubarak regime created fertile ground for the radicalization of the Sinai Bedouin. Between 2004 and 2006, a series of terrorist bombings were carried out against tourist targets in the Sinai, and it became evident that Salafism had begun to take root in the Bedouin community. The Egyptian government blamed the attacks on Bedouin from the Sawarka and Tarabeen tribes in the north, who the government claimed had acted in concert with members of Palestinian Islamist groups, a number of whom were now present in Sinai. In response to the attacks, the Mubarak regime imposed a series

[15] Pelham, *Sinai: The Buffer Erodes*, 2 – 3.
[16] Pelham, *Sinai: The Buffer Erodes*, 3 -5.
[17] Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front*, 10.

of draconian measures on Bedouin in the northern Sinai, where thousands were subjected to sweeping arrests and detained for long periods of time, while allegations of torture were widespread. Other claims of harsh treatment against the Bedouin, including the detention of family members of suspected individuals as a means for eliciting confessions, were common during this period.[18] The regime's response neglected to consider the grievances of the Bedouin community that had contributed to the rise of extremism, namely the systemic discrimination and economic exclusion they experienced due to government policies.

Though the presence of Islamism in the peninsula is by no means a new phenomenon, the process of Islamization among the Sinai Bedouin, which began in the mid-2000s, rapidly accelerated following the collapse of the Mubarak regime. Given that the Bedouin population of the Sinai historically has had a tenuous relationship with more fundamentalist strains of Islam, their deep-seated resentment of the government, driven by their stagnating socio-economic circumstances, created a fertile environment for Islamism to gain a foothold among the Sinai's indigenous population.[19] A key turning point in the Islamization of the Sinai Bedouin was the Egyptian government's harsh crackdown on the Bedouin in the aftermath of the Red Sea resort bombings, in which many of the Bedouin swept up in mass arrests by Egyptian security forces were thrown into prison cells with Salafists.[20]

Two significant incidents that served as factors accelerating the rate of radicalization among the Sinai Bedouin population are the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, and the economic blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip in 2007, following a coup that brought Hamas to power in Gaza. The withdrawal of the IDF from the Philadelphi Corridor and the subsequent blockade facilitated a renewed demand for smuggled goods, which by this point included the transfer of weapons.[21] As the Sinai Bedouin became dependent on Gaza to sustain the criminal smuggling network that served as their economic lifeline, they increasingly fell under the ideological influence of Hamas, and their enmity towards Israel grew.[22]

According to a recent report from Shin Bet, other factors contributing to the increasing Islamization of the Sinai Bedouin include: the longstanding alienation of the Bedouin population from successive Egyptian regimes whose policies alienated the indigenous population of the peninsula; the proliferation of Islamist websites which play a critical role in influencing Bedouin youth in particular; and the arrival of a number of foreign clerics and Gaza-based Islamists now residing in Sinai.[23]

The Emerging Terror Triangle: Sinai, Gaza, Israel

The terrorist threat emanating from the Sinai today can be viewed as a competition between two competing systems: The "local system," comprising terrorists operating out of the Sinai, and the "universal system," consisting of terrorists operating from countries neighboring Sinai. To date, the Egyptian government has failed to restore the rule of law in the peninsula, and has not been able to quell the growing terrorist infrastructure that has developed

[18] "Egypt: Mass Arrests and Torture in Sinai," Human Rights Watch, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2005), http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/02/21/egypt-mass-arrests-and-torture-sinai-0; Pelham, *Sinai: The Buffer Erodes*, 4.
[19] Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front*, 5.
[20] Pelham, *The Sinai Buffer Erodes*, 14 – 15.
[21] Jim Zanotti, *Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, December 2, 2010, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R41514.pdf.
[22] Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front*, 6 – 7.
[23] Ravid, "Shin Bet Forms New Unit to Thwart Attacks on Israel by Sinai Jihadists,"; Pelham, *Sinai: The Buffer Erodes*, 14; Yehuda Balanga, "Sinai: A Territory Without a Master," *Al Monitor*, June 23, 2012, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/security/01/06/trouble-from-the-south.html.

in recent years. In essence, the lawless state that has emerged in Sinai following Mubarak's ouster has led to the development of the peninsula as an "operational core," representing an interstice for the increasing connections between Sinai's Bedouin tribes and the influx of foreign fighters that have flocked to the Sinai to exploit the growing security vacuum. From Gaza-based Palestinian Islamist groups, to the formation of new groups ideologically affiliated with Al Qa'ida, and the increasing radicalization of Sinai Bedouin, the peninsula is now home to a growing terrorist infrastructure supported in part by a vast criminal smuggling network, threatening the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt which has lasted more than thirty years largely on account of the Sinai as a demilitarized buffer zone.

The Growing Presence of Al Qa'ida and Foreign Fighters in the Sinai

The description of the Sinai as "a kind of Wild West" was coined by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in April 2012, in response to reports that the peninsula was increasingly used by Iran and other external actors as a conduit for the transfer of illicit weapons to Hamas in Gaza, as well as a launching pad for attacks on Israel.[24]

According to an Israeli intelligence official: "We thought experienced global jihad operatives from Afghanistan and Iraq would come to Sinai, and from there to Gaza, but in practice, the operatives from Gaza are the ones who taught the operatives in Sinai everything they know. The Salafi operatives from Gaza are all breakaways from Hamas and Islamic Jihad who know the IDF well and have accumulated much more combat experience than the operatives from Sinai . . . The Gaza operatives are an operational asset."[25]

A recent Israeli intelligence report concluded that there are 15 different Salafi jihadist groups believed to be operating in the Sinai Peninsula. These groups are ideologically affiliated with Al Qa'ida – though they are not officially part of the organization – and the report notes that thus far, four out of the 15 groups have been active in plotting attacks against Israeli targets in recent years, both along the border and within southern Israel. The report notes that while the presence of foreign fighters is not insignificant, the majority of operatives are radicalized Sinai Bedouin. Although the Shin Bet report suggests the presence of several hundred Al Qa'ida affiliated operatives in the Sinai, Israel's military intelligence agency, Aman, puts the estimate at several thousand.[26]

The four groups identified in the Shin Bet report as the most active in planning attacks against Israeli targets are: Al Takfir wal-Hijra, Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, and Jaish al-Islam. The active presence of Jaish al-Islam in Sinai is a particularly troubling development, indicative of the increasing use of the Sinai by Gaza-based Palestinian Islamists. The organization was initially founded by the Dugmush clan based in Gaza, and in June 2006 was responsible for orchestrating the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit.[27]

Since 2011, Sinai has become a host to a plethora of Al Qa'ida affiliated militants, posing a direct threat to both the Egyptian government and Israel. Following the collapse of the Mubarak regime, the Egyptian military was deployed throughout the country in an effort to quell widespread urban unrest, leaving local law enforcement and tribal authorities responsible for security in the Sinai. The Sinai Bedouin, seizing the moment, launched a wave of attacks targeting police and army units, as well as frequent attacks on the Arab Gas Pipeline,

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[24] Ori Lewis, "Egypt's Sinai Turning into 'Wild West': Israeli PM," Reuters, April 24, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/24/us-israel-egypt-sinai-idUSBRE83N0EP20120424.
[25] Ravid, "Shin Bet Forms New Unit to Thwart Attacks on Israel by Sinai Jihadists."
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

which exports natural gas to Israel and Jordan.[28] After the July 2013 coup, and the execution of 25 Egyptian policemen mid-August 2013, the Egyptian army has increased its activity in the Sinai, launching fierce operations attempting to destroy jihadist terror activity and infrastructure.[29]

A startling recent development is the growing presence of Al Qa'ida, and Al Qa'ida affiliated groups in the Sinai. Lorenzo Vidino claimed that whereas the prevailing wisdom suggests that the Arab Spring signified a rejection of Al Qa'ida's ideology, "on a tactical level they have benefited in places like the Sinai."[30] Despite maintaining their own Islamist agenda, since 2011, these groups have in essence gained a foothold in the peninsula by co-opting Bedouin grievances. As Bruce Riedel noted: "The mix of global jihadist demands with local Bedouin grievances suggested the long-repressed Bedouin population of the Sinai has been radicalized by al-Qaeda activists, or at least sympathizers."[31] The onset of this startling new trend was evident in July 2011, when in the aftermath of an attack on a police station in El Arish, the attackers, referring to themselves as "Al Qa'ida in the Sinai Peninsula" released a statement calling for the establishment of an Islamic emirate in Sinai, nullification of the peace treaty with Israel, and called for an end to the government's long-standing discriminatory policies and economic marginalization of the Sinai Bedouin.[32]

Egyptian, Israeli and Western intelligence agencies have been aware of the growing presence of foreign fighters in the Sinai since the demise of the Mubarak regime in 2011. The number of foreign fighters is believed to be steadily increasing in light of the Egyptian military's failed efforts to reassert authority over the peninsula. By January 2013, Western intelligence officials believed that a significant number of foreign fighters from regional hot spots including Somalia, Yemen, Algeria and Libya were operating in the Sinai.[33] Many of those flocking to the Sinai are battle tested fighters, possessing operative experience in asymmetrical combat, while some bring expertise in the use of sophisticated weapons and other fighting techniques, and willingly share their expertise with local Bedouin militants. As a result of their vast experience, the presence of hundreds of foreign fighters in the peninsula has increased the threat facing Israel.

The growing presence of Al Qa'ida affiliated groups in the peninsula threatens to return Egypt to the days when Islamist organizations such as Al Gamaa al Islamiya routinely launched terror attacks against Egyptian targets, and the government responded with a host of repressive measures. For Israel, forced to maintain a lighter military footprint in Zone D in adherence with the terms of the security annex to the treaty, the increasing radicalization of the Sinai Bedouin and their cooperation with organizations ideologically affiliated with Al Qa'ida pose a significant threat. In the two months since the removal of President Morsi, a new influx of foreign fighters is believed to have arrived in Sinai, many arriving in the peninsula following calls for jihad against

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[28] As of June 2013, the pipeline has been attacked 15 times since the start of the revolution. "Egyptian Gas Supply to Jordan Stabilizes at Below Contract Rate," *Al Ahram*, June 3, 2013, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/72994/Business/Economy/Egyptian-gas-supply-to-Jordan-stabilises-at-below-.aspx.

[29] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Militants Kill Soldiers in Sinai, and Egypt's Military Broadens Its Crackdown," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/world/middleeast/militants-kill-soldiers-in-sinai-and-egypts-military-broadens-its-crackdown.html.

[30] "Terrorism Experts: Al-Qaida Tightens Grip in Sinai Peninsula," *Haaretz*, September 15, 2011, http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east-terrorism-experts-al-qaida-tightens-grip-in-sinai-peninsula-1.284697.

[31] Bruce Riedel, "Al-Qaeda Grows in Sinai," *The National Interest,* February 10, 2012, http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/al-qaeda-grows-sinai-6486.

[32] Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front, 4*; Bruce Riedel, "Al Qaeda's New Sinai Front," *The Daily Beast*, August 21, 2011, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/08/21/al-qaeda-s-newest-front-in-sinai-could-deepen-arab-israeli-conflict.html.

[33] David Barnett, "Rising Concerns Over Foreign Militants in the Sinai as More Explosives Seized," *The Long War Journal*, January 19, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/01/concern_that_militants_from_al.php.

the Egyptian military.[34] Israeli intelligence estimated that within two months of Morsi's ouster, more than 300 terror attacks on Egyptian forces stationed in the Sinai had been perpetrated by Sinai-based militants.[35] In September 2013, the Egyptian military launched a large-scale military offensive in Sinai. While the government claims the operation is in response to the increasing attacks in Sinai, many Bedouin view the operation as a pretext for returning to the repressive policies of the Mubarak regime and have continued to launch attacks on Egyptian security forces in response.[36] The shift in focus to targeting the Egyptian government is likely temporary, and the threat to Israel remains high. As GOC Southern Command Maj. Gen. Sami Turgeman stated in a recent interview: "As they see it, once they are done taking care of Egypt, they'll have time for us, as is evident from the recent rocket fire on Eilat."[37]

Hamas and the Sinai Bedouin

Evidence of increasing cooperation between northern Sinai Bedouin tribes and Hamas first began to emerge in the last years of the Mubarak regime.[37] By 2007, Hamas and other Gaza-based militants' increasing cooperation with the Sinai Bedouin grew out of necessity. The Israeli-imposed economic blockade, which the Mubarak regime adhered to, had the unintended effect of improving cross-border cooperation and accelerating the radicalization of Sinai Bedouin. As well, the blockade led to the increasing proliferation of weapons, many of which were smuggled through Egypt from Qadhafi's arsenals in Libya, to Hamas in Gaza.[38]

Since 2007, the expansion of the tunnel network facilitated Hamas' increasing presence in the Sinai, and as a result of Hamas' inroads in the peninsula, the tunnels soon became a conduit for the flow of weapons in *both* directions. In 2010, Hamas had reportedly begun transferring heavy weapons to storage sites in Sinai. Evidence of the increasing flow of heavy weapons into Sinai was evident in October of that year, when Eilat and Aqaba were struck by missiles launched from the Sinai.[39]

Hamas considers the Sinai to be a vital operational platform. Beyond utilizing the territory and its indigenous population to accrue weapons and other commodities, since 2010 Hamas and other Gaza-based Islamist organizations have used the Sinai as an operational platform to launch attacks against Israel. Whereas the Israelis routinely respond to attacks from Gaza by carrying out airstrikes, in response to the escalation in attacks emanating from the Sinai, Israel has largely refrained from taking offensive measures in the peninsula to avoid jeopardizing the peace agreement with Egypt. Israel's restraint however, has helped foster an environment in Sinai for Palestinian Islamists to operate with relative impunity. Although the Egyptian military has recently launched an offensive along the Egyptian-Gaza border intending to destroy the tunnels,

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[34] "Local, Foreign Islamic Militants Turn Egypt's Sinai into a New Front for Jihad," *The Washington Post*, September 3, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/local-foreign-islamic-militants-turn-egypts-sinai-a-new-front-for-jihad/2013/09/03/ea34cb96-14c1-11e3-b220-2c950c7f3263_story.html; Institute for Counter-terrorism, "The Military Coup in Egypt as a Catalyst for Increased Terrorist Activity in Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula," September 7, 2013, http://www.ict.org.il/ResearchPublications/JihadiWebsitesMonitoring/JWMGInsights/tabid/320/Articlsid/1192/currentpage/1/Default.aspx.

[35] Yoav Limor, "Sinai Jihadis Want to Overthrow Egypt, Then They'll Come for Israel," *Israel Hayom*, September 4, 2013, http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article?php?id-11815.

[36] Local, Foreign Islamic Militants Turn Egypt's Sinai into a New Front for Jihad," *The Washington Post*, September 3, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/local-foreign-islamic-militants-turn-egypts-sinai-a-new-front-for-jihad/2013/09/03/ea34cb96-14c1-11e3-b220-2c950c7f3263_story.html.

[37] Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front*, 4.

[38] Gili Cohen, "Sinai Peacekeeping Force Commander Warns of Weapons Smuggling to Gaza," *Haaretz*, May 31, 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/sinai-peacekeeping-force-commander-warns-of-weapons-smuggling-to-gaza-1.433567.

[39] Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front*, 6; Stephen Farrell and Isabel Kershner, "Rockets Hits Resort on Border of Jordan and Israel," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/03/world/middleeast/03israel.html.

previous attempts to undermine the smuggling network along the Egypt-Gaza border have failed to fully eradicate them.[40] Often following an operation the tunnels are rebuilt, restoring the illicit economy that has become a lifeline for both Sinai Bedouin and Gaza residents. Moreover if the current operation fails to reassert the government's authority in the peninsula, it will likely result in an increase in attacks on Egyptian security forces in the Sinai, given that the operation is interrupting a vital economic enterprise for the Bedouin.

Implications for Israel and Egypt

In the wake of Mubarak's ouster the Sinai Bedouin were among the first groups to take up arms and launch a series of attacks on local Egyptian security forces. By August 2011, the Bedouin had begun launching cross-border attacks, striking Israeli targets along the border area and in southern Israel, as well as carrying out attacks on Israeli interests in the Sinai, notably the Arab Gas pipeline in El Arish. Since then, numerous attacks on Israel have emanated from the Sinai—perpetrated by Sinai Bedouin, Palestinian militants and Al Qa'ida affiliated groups that now operate from the peninsula. The shift in attacks on Israeli interests was in response to a series of measures taken by Israel following the revolution in Egypt. Although these measures, including barring Israeli citizens from traveling to the Sinai, and beginning construction on a security fence along the southern border with Egypt, were taken with Israeli interests in mind, they had a direct impact on the economic livelihood of the Bedouin, and as a result had the unintended effect of furthering ties between the increasingly militant Sinai Bedouin and Gaza-based Palestinian militants.[41]

Since 2011, the IDF has thwarted numerous attacks emanating from the Sinai. The August 2011 attack that struck multiple targets in southern Israel was a turning point in Bedouin terror operations, marking the first time that they intended to strike targets outside of the Sinai, and signified a shift in what had once been favorable views of the Israelis. It was also a stunning wake up call to the Israelis of the fragility of the peace treaty, and the ease with which Israel could suddenly be dragged into a renewed confrontation with Egypt.

Following the attack, then-Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak claimed that: "Sometimes you have to subordinate strategic considerations to tactical needs."[42] This statement was intended to explain the Israeli government's willingness to permit the deployment of additional Egyptian military forces into Sinai. Yet since August 2011, the number of attacks emanating from Sinai—including those that were successful and the large number thwarted by Israeli security forces—has increased considerably, rendering it necessary for the Israelis to devise an operational response to mitigate the threat, and prevent a future attack from destroying the relationship between Cairo and Jerusalem, a key objective in the militants' strategy of attacking Israeli targets.

Egypt too has a vested interest in halting the deterioration of law and order in the Sinai, although at the moment it appears that Sinai security is merely one of a myriad of issues that Cairo is grappling with. For the past decade, the erosion of security in the Sinai has led to a decline in tourism—a major source of revenue for Egypt, comprising nearly 11 percent of GDP.[43] Moreover, the frequent attacks on Egypt's natural gas pipeline perpetrated by Bedouin militants looking to

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[40] William Booth and Abigail Hauslohner, "Egypt Shutting Economic Lifeline for Gaza Strip, in Move to Isolate Hamas," *The Washington Post*, September 8, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-09-08/world/41880965_1_rafah-sari-bashi-tunnels.

[41] Guy Bechor, "Inside the Black Box: The Sinai Bedouin Code," *Gplanet*, October 5, 2012, http://www.gplanet.co.il/logon.asp?pro_id=1682; Pelham, *The Sinai Buffer Erodes*, 6 – 7.

[42] "Springtime in Sinai," *The Economist,* August 27, 2011, http://www.economist.com/node/21526921.

[43] "Egypt: Tourism Industry in Deep Decline," *Euronews*, August 26, 2013, http://www.euronews.com/2013/08/26/egypt-tourism-industry-in-deep-decline/; Pelham, *The Sinai Buffer Erodes*, 19.

foment tension in the relationship between Cairo and Jerusalem, arguably harmed Egypt more so than Israel.[44] Thus improving the security situation in the Sinai has a number of potential benefits that could assist Egypt in the current process of establishing a new government and restoring the country's economy.

Policy Recommendations

The emerging threat in the Sinai stems largely from the growing ideological closeness between the Sinai Bedouin and the rise of Islamist movements operating in the peninsula. Further deterioration of the security situation in the peninsula could potentially serve as a catalyst for military escalation between Egypt and Israel and threaten the viability of the peace agreement. Moreover, the emergence of Sinai as an operational core could have far reaching implications, as fighters and weapons make their way from Sinai to other conflict zones in the region.

There are a number of operative and political limitations that must be taken into account by Egypt and Israel in devising a long-term strategy to mitigate the threat. As discussed above, since 2011, the Sinai has devolved into a lawless zone that the Egyptians have been unable to gain control over, and the Israelis have refrained from launching an offensive operation, opting instead to adhere to the terms of the peace treaty while hoping that the government in Cairo would make a sustained effort to reassert its authority. The uptick in violence in the peninsula and the deliberate targeting of Egyptian security forces and the MFO has hindered the ability of the peacekeeping force to oversee the implementation of the security annex to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. Though for the moment, its presence has a low operational effectiveness; it has an overall contribution to the peace treaty stability.

Preserve the Existing Terms of the Peace Treaty

The growing security threat in Sinai has created a dilemma for both Egypt and Israel. For Egypt, the government under both Mubarak and Morsi largely neglected the peninsula, and promises to improve the living conditions of the Bedouin were largely unmet, fueling the Sinai Bedouin's resentment towards the government. Currently, should the government in Cairo want to increase troop levels in the Sinai as part of a sustained effort to reduce the pervasive lawlessness in the peninsula, it must first seek permission from the Israelis, pursuant to the terms of the security annex of the peace agreement. This requirement represents a source of national humiliation for the government and has led some in Egypt to question whether continuing to abide by the terms of the treaty in light of recent events is in the national security interests of Egypt.[45]

While many Egyptians, and quite a few voices in Israel point to the ongoing instability in Sinai to advocate that the terms of the treaty be renegotiated to reflect present-day security threats, Israel has a compelling argument in refusing to renegotiate the terms of the treaty, at least at present.

For many Israelis, the arguments put forth by the Egyptian government seem disingenuous, in light of the fact that under both Mubarak and Morsi, the Egyptian government did not take all of the measures available to reassert control over the Sinai and to curb the Bedouin smuggling network. As a result, many Israelis believe that the true intentions of the Egyptians are to slowly alter the terms of the treaty, one element at a time, until it is rendered completely null and void. They point to the fact that since the fall of Mubarak, it is evident that when it chooses too, the Egyptian government can

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[44] "Egypt Ends Gas Deal with Israel, Stakeholder Says," *Reuters*, April 22, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/22/israel-egypt-gas-idUSL5E8FM2SG20120422.

[45] "Tamarod Movement Calls on Egyptian Government to Cancel Camp David Peace Treaty," The Jerusalem Post, August 17, 2013, http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Tamarod-movement-calls-on-Egyptian-government-to-cancel-Camp-David-peace-treaty-stop-accepting-US-aid-323386; "Peace Treaty with Israel Should be Amended, Says Morsy Advisor," Egypt Independent, September 13, 2012, http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/peace-treaty-israel-should-be-amended-says-morsy-advisor.

coordinate with the Israelis and launch operations to curb the growing threat in the Sinai, and therefore renegotiating the treaty to establish a new permanent military arrangement is unnecessary, and doing so may pose a greater threat to Israel's security in the long run.

A recent simulation conducted by the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv concluded that the very act of "opening or amending the treaty is a more complex process than one would think." According to the results of the simulation, both Egypt and Israel maintain a number of criteria and goals with respect to restoring the deteriorating security situation in the Sinai, but in the process of negotiating new terms, may find that they are much farther apart in a number of critical aspects, rendering it unlikely that the two sides will in fact reach a new agreement. Furthermore, given that many in Egypt deeply resent the treaty and successive governments' continued adherence to it, the mere act of beginning a process to renegotiate its terms may compel a new regime in Cairo to take a harder line in the discussions with Israel, or to withdraw from the negotiations altogether. As well, given current political instability in Egypt and the uncertainty going forward, making permanent changes to the security arrangement now could put Israel at greater risk in the long term.[46]

The Israeli Operative Component

In response to the threat from the Sinai, Israel has already adopted a number of measures, including granting the Egyptians' request for the deployment of additional troops on more than one occasion since August 2011, pursuant to the terms of the security annex. In addition, the Israelis have implemented a host of new defensive measures on their side of the border, including significant upgrades in surveillance sensors and other technology used to detect infiltrators, deploying additional troops to the border area, and constructing a border fence. Recently, a new Shin Bet unit was created, with the sole purpose of foiling attacks emanating from the Sinai. "The creation of the new unit, and the fact that its resources reportedly match those of other Shin Bet units tasked with thwarting terror threats in Judea and Samaria, is indicative of the extent to which the Israelis are increasingly concerned about the terrorist threat from Sinai. While these new defensive measures are a start, they are by no means sufficient. It is imperative that Israel reassess its security posture towards Sinai and develop an operational response to adequately address the erosion of a buffer zone and the increasing radicalization of the Bedouin.

The primary challenge facing Israel is to maintain security along the Egyptian-Israel border and bar further cross-border infiltrations and rocket attacks from targeting its citizens in southern Israel. This will require the Israelis to continue to maintain vigilant surveillance of the border area and continue to improve intelligence gathering mechanisms to closely monitor the extremist elements in Sinai.

Indeed the aftermath of the August 2011 attack, in which Israeli forces clashed with Egyptian troops, killing five after pursuing the attackers into Sinai, and the recent allegations that the Israelis had launched a drone strike in Sinai, are indicative of the dilemma that Israeli policymakers are currently grappling with. [47] The frequent cross-border attacks place the Israeli government in a difficult position, having to balance sensitivity toward Israeli military operations in Sinai with the responsibility to

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[46] Gabi Siboni ed., *Israel-Egypt Relations in Light of Security-Related Incidents in the Sinai Peninsula: Political-Security Simulation*, Military and Strategic Affairs Program, Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University (September 2012), 25-25, http://cdn.www.inss.org.il/reblazecdn.net/upload/%28FILE%291351077683.pdf.

[47] Maggie Michael and Ian Deitch, "Egypt to Withdraw Ambassador to Israel Over Ambush," *The Independent*, August 20, 2011, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/egypt-to-withdraw-ambassador-to-israel-over-ambush-2341011.html; Oren Dorell, "Sinai 'Drone Strike' Highlights Israel-Egypt Operations," *USA Today*, August 13, 2012, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/08/13/did-israeli-drone-strike-egypt/2643595/.

protect Israel's security. As a result, it is essential that the Israelis devise a use of force strategy. The existence of a strategy that takes into account the nature of the current threat would provide the Israeli government with flexibility in responding to another terrorist attack launched from the Sinai, rather than resulting in a hasty decision that could destabilize the relationship between Cairo and Jerusalem. In the event that the next attack from the Sinai renews the confrontation between Egypt and Israel, the existence of a use of force doctrine will serve as a warning to militants who view the Sinai as a zone of impunity, that the Israelis are prepared to take military action as necessary to defend its citizens and territory from further acts of terror emanating from Sinai.

Operative collaboration with the Egyptian military is essential and should be strengthened in order to dovetail operational capabilities. This cooperation should be enhanced to all operational field commanders. Thus enabling the building of trust, exchange of real-time and sensitive intelligence and even collaborate operationally when possible. The issue of Iran should be of concern as well. Iran views the Sinai Peninsula both as an access route to Hamas and as an arena in and of itself to be used for attacking Israel and damaging Israeli-Egyptian relations. We suggest considering cooperation with the United States and the relevant forces in Egypt to stop this process. Finally, the MFO's function in Sinai though operationally less effective, should be preserved. This is in Israel's best interests, as the MFO's presence confers many advantages to the country, notably maintaining the peace treaty and preventing undesirable escalation in the relations with Egypt.

The development of an updated operational concept together with the establishment of a joint command and control center would assist in supporting the operative response along the Egypt-Israel border. This center would include representatives from the military and other Israeli security services, the Israeli police—including representatives from border and immigration police forces—and agents from the Customs Authority.

Hamas and other Gaza-based militant organizations have increasingly relied on the Sinai as a base of operations in recent years, due in part on the knowledge that an Israeli military response would be curtailed due to the terms of the treaty. The development of an Israeli operative response that will end impunity for Sinai-based terrorism, while respecting the terms of the treaty, may send a strong signal to Hamas and other Gaza-based militants that the Sinai will no longer be permitted to serve as a base of operations for launching attacks into Israel, while avoiding drawing the ire of the Egyptian public.

The Egyptian Operative Component

Currently, a large part of the Egyptian force stationed in the peninsula is neither qualified nor adequately trained to respond to the growing terrorist threat in the Sinai. Moreover since 2011, the Egyptian government has not launched a sustained military effort to maintain sovereignty, preferring short-term operations, such as Operation Eagle in 2011 and Operation Sinai in 2012, that temporarily crack down on militant activities in the peninsula, but lack a long term objective. To assist the Egyptians in reasserting authority over the peninsula, members of the international community that have a stake in improving security in the Sinai should invest in further training of Egyptian military forces deployed in the area, as well as provide a range of external capabilities—including providing intelligence and additional training of Egyptian forces—to aid the military in taking effective action in the Sinai.

One suggestion, albeit one that would undoubtedly cause widespread controversy in Egypt, would be the establishment of a joint Egyptian-American-international force designed to operate in the Sinai. Such a force would be able to receive intelligence

and operative support from a range of relevant American agencies, and would likely be more effective in securing the Sinai than an Egyptian force acting independently, given the vast array of resources that a joint force such as the one proposed in this model could bring to the area.

Implementing an Economic Development Strategy in Sinai

Economic investment in the Sinai, designed to spur development projects and improve the socio-economic status of the Sinai Bedouin would go a long way towards reducing the current threat. Ultimately, the Egyptian government must be the leader in implementing a development strategy for the peninsula. However, this process cannot be accomplished without assistance from the international community, both in the form of providing direct economic assistance and encouraging the Egyptians to make a sustained effort to follow through on development projects that will improve the socio-economic status of the Sinai Bedouin in the long-term.

Ultimately, in developing a response to prevent the Sinai from sliding further into disarray, it is imperative to address the long standing economic marginalization and systemic discrimination of the Sinai Bedouin. Over the past decade, under both Mubarak and Morsi, harsh repressive military crackdowns have failed to curb the terrorist threat in the peninsula. On the contrary, these draconian responses have fueled extremism among the Bedouin, and have created an environment ripe for Islamist organizations to exploit to their own advantage. During his one year in office, President Morsi's approach to dealing with the Sinai Bedouin waffled between attempting dialogue with the Bedouin community and ordering a military crackdown. Ultimately many of his promises to improve the living standards of the Bedouin—including steps to facilitate their inclusion in Egyptian society and implementing new development projects - failed to materialize, given that the authorities were unwilling to commit to them wholeheartedly.[48]

A response that addresses these grievances provides the best opportunity of mitigating the growing terrorist threat in the Sinai in the long term. While Cairo is enmeshed in ongoing efforts to determine Egypt's political future, the need to address the challenges in the Sinai provides an opportunity for the involvement of the international community, and countries that have a stake in restoring security in the Sinai Peninsula should play an active role. The United States in particular, has a vested interest in curbing the growing terrorist threat in the Sinai, given its financial and personnel investment in the MFO, and its stated policy of protecting the security of Israel. In the past, the U.S. has demonstrated a willingness to invest in development aid in the Sinai, but often these offers were refused by the Egyptian government (while some are still waiting to be acknowledged). An initial investment—between $2 and $3 billion dollars—that could be put towards development projects in the region in the areas of land rights, water, jobs, education, municipal institutions and necessary infrastructure, could serve as an initial step in getting such a program off the ground and begin the long-term policy of improving the socio-economic status of the Sinai Bedouin, thus diminishing their growing extremism.

[48] Immanuel Marx, in discussion with the authors, December 4, 2012.

The Military and Strategic Affairs Program at the Institute for National Security Studies

Changes in Israel's strategic environment and the threats it currently faces prompt a thorough review of the military component of Israel's security concept. This must include a review of the principles underlying force buildup and the use of force, which have a decisive influence on the ability of the IDF to provide an appropriate response to the range of threats facing the country.

The goal of the Military and Strategic Affairs program is to identify the various components that impact directly on the IDF's military structure, the way it functions, and its evolution. Currently the primary components include: the confrontation of conventional threats and terrorism; the development of defensive and offensive strategies in response to the threat of high trajectory fire; and identification of international developments and potential dangers embedded in the non-conventional threat, primarily from Iran. The program also studies universal military theory, in an effort to provide a conceptual framework for meeting Israel's military needs and challenges.

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