

Arms Control in Civil Society: Controlling Conventional Arms Smuggling in Sinai

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the Sinai Peninsula – the 60,000 sq km border region connecting North Africa to the Middle East – has evolved from a relatively quiet buffer zone between Egypt and Israel into a lawless frontier of conflict awash with increasingly advanced weaponry. Most of these weapons originate in Libya and Sudan, and are smuggled into Sinai by indigenous Bedouin tribesmen. The smugglers hoard the weapons for their own purposes or turn a profit by either selling them to Sinai residents or smuggling them into Gaza via tunnels underneath the Philadelphi Corridor – the 14 km strip of land running along the Egyptian-Gaza border. Any approach to arms control in Sinai must tackle the phenomenon of arms smuggling. So long as illicit weapons continue to flow into Sinai, any state attempt to rid the population of them will be futile.

Numbering around 300,000, the Bedouin comprise roughly 70 percent of the Sinai population. With help from their stockpiled arms, they rose during the 2011 Egyptian revolution to chase out President Hosni Mubarak's widely despised government officials and heavy-handed (now defunct) state security forces, and arms smuggling flourished in the ensuing political and security vacuum. The state has responded by collapsing smuggling tunnels, improving its intelligence coverage, intercepting, with the help of US-donated scanners, weapons crossing the Suez Canal, and deploying forces on its borders with Sudan and Libya, among other measures. While these efforts have made some headway against smuggling, illicit arms remain readily

available in a peninsula gripped by spiraling insecurity. In the wake of the July 3, 2013 ouster of former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, violence has spiked again in what has become nearly an all-out war between Egyptian military and Salafist jihadi groups in Sinai – most prominent among them Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis, and al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya.

The deteriorating security situation and the growing polarization of the Sinai Peninsula have not developed within a vacuum. The landscape of the Middle East is changing: as centralized states dissolve, their power and authority are diffusing across civil societies and non-state actors. In the absence of strong, legitimate state institutions and social consensuses on the shapes of these new states, many of these newly empowered actors are beholden unto no higher authority. To navigate the resulting turmoil, states must adapt their national security doctrines; since the state is no longer the principal actor on the domestic scene, it cannot act alone. For new national security doctrines to be effective, they must be formulated with the input and buy-in of civil society. In Sinai, any long term state solution to weapons proliferation and trafficking must include the newly empowered – albeit state-marginalized – Bedouin population. The post-Mubarak approach of “be and let be,” punctuated by periodic security and smuggling crackdowns, does little to build the harmony of interests that lies at the core of every effective arms control regime. It does not offer sufficient incentives to outweigh the profits of arms smuggling and the risks of disarmament. Nor does the military have the resources, personnel, or will to sustain these crackdowns and counter-smuggling efforts in the long-term – or the counter-insurgency training to protect itself while doing so. A more holistic approach must be developed that addresses the root causes of arms smuggling.

Accordingly, it falls to the Egyptian government and security forces to work together with local Bedouin tribes to understand and address the incentives that lead to arms trafficking; transform social norms that have come to accept smuggling as a legitimate livelihood; incorporate local intelligence and Bedouin into the security forces to enhance the efficacy of “hard power” measures; and ultimately, encourage the population to participate in weapons collection drives.

Overview of the Problem

Arms smuggling in Sinai is not a new phenomenon. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad smuggled weapons via underground tunnels from cities like Rafah as early as the mid-1990s, and this activity intensified during the second intifada. In particular, smuggling flourished following the 2005 Israeli disengagement from Gaza and Hamas's 2007 takeover of the coastal enclave. The subsequent Israeli air, sea, and land blockade of Gaza led to a burgeoning demand for smuggled commodities, and the business and tunnel infrastructure expanded accordingly. According to Israeli intelligence estimates, roughly "250 tons of explosives, 80 tons of fertilizer, 4000 rocket-propelled grenades, and 1800 rockets were transported from Egypt to Gaza from September 2005 to December 2008."¹

For the most part, the Egyptian state security forces turned a blind eye or were complicit in the illicit flow of weapons and goods, often demanding bribes in exchange for keeping tunnel operators out of jail. In 2007, then-Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni publicly denounced Egyptian efforts against smuggling into Gaza as "terrible," claiming that she possessed videotape evidence of Egyptian police helping Hamas smuggle militants and weaponry across the border.² Some Bedouin even accuse the security forces as having first introduced them to the arms trade.³

Yet it was in the wake of Mubarak's fall in early 2011 that the smuggling industry in Sinai reached its zenith. With the collapse of the state security forces, smugglers were free to move unfettered across the desert. Tribal networks familiar with the rugged desert and mountainous terrain move easily across the region, aided by their machine gun-mounted 4x4 pickups and Land Cruisers, dubbed by many as "the new camel." As Mohamad Sabry, a journalist and activist from the northern town of el-Arish describes, "Geography is one of the main reasons it is difficult to exert control over Sinai; Bedouins know their land more than the authorities and have secret escape routes."⁴

After the 2011 overthrow of Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, looted Libyan arsenals flooded the black market with a variety of advanced weaponry, catapulting the business to new heights. The Sawarka, Rumaylat, and Tarabeen tribes, whose lands border Gaza, dominate the trade. A young political activist from Sinai noted, "Following the security breakdown in the wake of the revolution and easy access to Libyan arms, Bedouins took over the trade in north Sinai. It is so lucrative that they not only earn a living but can

amass fortunes.”⁵ Thus, while reports of interceptions of rockets, anti-aircraft missiles, and other explosives by Egyptian forces have peppered the media, a growing number of newly built villas and luxury cars have peppered the landscape of northern Sinai.⁶

Not all of the weapons that flow through Sinai are smuggled into Gaza. In recent years, the desert has witnessed a surge in armed militias and terrorist groups, including armed gangs that target the Egyptian security forces and state infrastructure, Salafi jihadist groups, and Palestinian terrorist operatives and their Sinai-based ideological offshoots. As these armed elements and their activities proliferate, they contribute to a growing domestic demand for arms.

Many of these are Bedouin smuggling networks that used their massive accumulated wealth to heavily arm themselves for both defensive and offensive purposes. They seek to protect their newfound riches and lucrative smuggling routes from rival tribes, and protect themselves from police crackdowns and arrests. “This business of the [smuggling] tunnels brings in billions of pounds, so a lot of people have interest in it, and they have interests in stopping any police presence there,” explained General Essam al-Bedawi, head of media affairs at the Egyptian Department of Homeland Security.⁷ Indeed, several Egyptian policemen stationed near the border with Israel were shot and killed by migrant smugglers.⁸

However, these gangs, deeply resentful of state security forces after years of brutal crackdowns, mass arrests, and widespread corruption, have also used their newfound military might to settle old scores and demand reparations. “We’ll kill them if they return,” one Bedouin sheikh said of the police.⁹ True to their word, Bedouin gunmen have sprayed police checkpoints with heavy weaponry, killed policemen in revenge for Bedouin deaths, stormed seaside resorts, and abducted hostages.¹⁰ They leveraged their ability to hold security forces by the throat to demand a list of concessions from the government. These include amnesty for Bedouin who were sentenced, often in absentia, under Mubarak; Egyptian citizenship for the thousands of Bedouin who are without; acknowledgment of Bedouin land ownership; basic municipal services for Bedouin villages; an end to government appointment of mukhtars (tribal chiefs); access to jobs in government, the military, and local industry; and compensation for the tribes whose land is used for the Egyptian-Israeli-Jordanian gas line.¹¹

Bedouin disgruntlement, combined with the security vacuum and porous borders, has also fed into a burgeoning jihadi presence. Sinai has seen a rise in Salafi jihadi groups since the early 2000s, when a series of bombings at Taba and other seaside resorts resulted in the deaths of over 100 people, mostly Egyptians. The state responded with a massive crackdown that decimated the leadership of the alleged Salafi culprits, al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, yet other groups rose on its heels.

The rise of these Salafi jihadists can be attributed to several factors. Since the 1980s, the Bedouin, largely wary of Islamism due to its emphasis on religion over tribe and its perceived threat to hierarchical tribal structure, were increasingly exposed to Salafi doctrine. Bedouin youth who spent time in Egyptian jails, studied in predominantly Islamist universities in the Delta, or worked abroad in Saudi Arabia introduced Salafi thought to Sinai upon their return. As one Massoura sheikh explained, “When state security [arbitrarily] arrested the men of Sinai and threw them in prisons, we demanded that they would be separated from militant Islamists so that radical thought wouldn’t diffuse. But no one listened.”¹² Hamas’s crackdown on jihadists in Gaza in 2009 sent additional Salafis fleeing into Sinai,¹³ while its strengthened economic ties with Bedouin in northeastern Sinai created a new channel for the export of its ideology, heightening Palestinian sympathies among the Bedouin. The fusion of radical Salafi doctrine, anti-Israeli sentiment, Bedouin grievances against the state, and a sense of solidarity generated by indiscriminate state arrests fostered ripe conditions for terror recruitment. These groups have flourished within the post-Morsi security vacuum, their numbers bolstered by jihadist fugitives who broke free from Egyptian prisons during the revolution, and by a growing number of foreign jihadis. Some of these groups are al-Qaeda inspired – such as the shadowy Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, whose videos have featured clips of speeches by former Islamic State of Iraq leaders Abu Musab al-Zarqawi¹⁴ and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.¹⁵

Working in conjunction or independently of these Sinai-based groups are Gaza-based terror operatives, such as those belonging to Jaish al-Islam (Army of Islam), who infiltrated into Sinai via smuggling tunnels or maintain cells in Sinai to launch attacks against Israeli and Sinai targets.

Attacks by these groups have spiked in the wake of Morsi’s ouster, with almost daily, increasingly sophisticated attacks on security forces in Sheikh Zuwiad and el-Arish. Some of these attacks are in reaction to Morsi’s ouster – not because their perpetrators necessarily approved of Morsi (indeed, many

Salafists rejected him for being too moderate in his implementation of *sharia*), but because they see his ouster as part and parcel of a broader state attack on Islamism. Others simply seek to take advantage of the domestic unrest to challenge Egyptian forces, promote their demands, and signal that they will not accept a return to the police state of the Mubarak era. However, in recent months, these attacks have been obscured by the far more sensational – and deadly – assaults by jihadi groups such as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, who ratcheted up their campaign (in ferocity and propaganda, if not in number) against the military since the latter launched its latest crackdown in August.

Taken together, the rise of these groups has led to Sinai's snowballing militarization. As they proliferate, the groups seek a greater number of weapons to protect their interests, fend off the state's security forces, and launch their offensives. The spread of armed conflict heightens the already pervasive sense of insecurity in the region and the local demand for arms.

Current Efforts and Policy Recommendations

In the past, Egyptian counter-smuggling efforts in Sinai met with limited success. Prior to its latest offensive, Egyptian security forces conducted three large scale operations – the first following the 2004-2006 terrorist attacks, the second in August 2011, and the third in the wake of the August 5, 2012 attacks. Although purported to be crackdowns on jihadi elements in the Peninsula, in practice they resulted in the mass arrests of thousands of non-jihadi Sinai residents.¹⁶ The blanket security sweeps did little to combat smuggling, while their aggravation of tensions between Sinai residents and security forces gave jihadi elements fodder for future recruitment.

The full effects of the latest military offensive remain to be seen, but by most estimates, it has successfully destroyed roughly 80-90 percent of the smuggling tunnels to Gaza and has begun to clear a 500 meter wide zone along the border that will significantly complicate any future efforts to revive the business.

Yet tunnel destruction is a tactic – not a strategy. It has brought the illicit trade to a near halt without providing any alternative economic livelihood to the many Bedouin who supplied, worked, or owned the tunnels. It is an ad hoc, military approach to what will ultimately require a long term, political-economic solution. Moreover, it inflames the tensions between the Bedouin and the state.

Although the military has claimed “our highest rates for successfully achieving our targets,”¹⁷ locals complain of indiscriminate targeting that has resulted in civilian deaths and widespread damage to homes and mosques. The resulting anger has provided local jihadi groups with a crucial advantage in the broader narrative battle. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis videos open with clips of police brutality against protestors, military raids of homes, and images of the charred bodies of children.¹⁸ A September 4, 2013 statement released by al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya included photos of a damaged mosque and accused the military of targeting homes hosting women, children, and the elderly.¹⁹ By carefully couching their rhetoric in the language of local grievances, these groups use the military’s imprudence to expand their local recruitment, feeding the demand for arms.

To deal with the proliferation of arms across the Peninsula, therefore, the Egyptian government must couple its “hard” measures of tunnel destruction, weapons cache seizures, and tighter border security with a multifaceted “soft power” approach that tackles the incentives of arms smuggling. More specifically, the Bedouin cannot be coerced into cooperation; Egypt must reach out to them economically, politically, and socially. They must have something to lose; only when they have a personal stake in the security and the stability of their region will their interests begin to overlap with those of the state. Such an approach should consist of four elements; (1) development of the Sinai Peninsula to incentivize alternative livelihoods to arms smuggling; (2) integration of the Bedouin into the security of the area; (3) continuation of traditional “hard” security measures, including the tunnel demolitions and arrests of smugglers; and (4) incentivization of disarmament and recruitment of local Bedouin communities in the collection of illicit arms.

Development of Sinai

Since Egypt regained control over Sinai in 1982, the Bedouin have been largely excluded from the three pillars of the Sinai economy – the agricultural, industrial, and tourism sectors. With no state recognition of Bedouin land ownership, a shortage of accessible water, a lack of basic facilities, and the emigration of Bedouin youth to more profitable jobs in the Nile Valley region,²⁰ local Bedouin agriculture has had few legs on which to stand. Local farmers rely mostly on rainwater and over-exploited groundwater that is often saline. The al-Salam Canal, constructed as part of the 1997 North Sinai Agricultural

Development Project (NSADP), suffers from severe water shortages, while the water that does exist is largely polluted by saline groundwater and waste from the Hadous and Serw drains. Its location has also sparked land feuds with local Bedouin who claim tribal ownership.²¹ Moreover, plots that were sold by the state were mostly allotted to big farmers who employed Nile Valley migrants, shutting off any local Bedouin from the benefits of their region's agricultural development.²²

The Bedouin have been similarly excluded from the tourism industry in the south and the scant private industry that exists in the north and central Sinai. Although more than 80 percent of the Sinai population resides in the north, the south has long enjoyed greater state, private, and international investment and development due to its idyllic tourist sites and Suez oil. Between 1991 and 1993, the World Bank allocated roughly \$850 million to fund infrastructure and environmental protection projects in Sinai, managed by the Egyptian Tourism Development Authority (TDA).²³ Disregarding local Bedouin land claims, the TDA auctioned off coastal and desert lands at \$1 per square meter to private investors, who developed hundreds of luxury hotels and a thriving tourist industry. Bedouin were again debarred from the region's development, with Nile Valley migrants hired almost exclusively for the attendant job boom, including in the informal employment sector.²⁴ Nile Valley migrants were similarly favored for the jobs created by the few private factories and quarries in North Sinai and Central Sinai. Local resentment of several of the factories in the north is compounded by their cooperation with Israeli industry in the Peninsula's Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs).²⁵

So long as the Bedouin have no other means of economic livelihood, smuggling will continue. Shut out from regional employment opportunities and unable to sustain their traditional agriculture and pastoral livelihoods, Bedouin have made do with the scarce resources they do possess, namely, arms, drugs, and illegal immigrants, a thriving black market, and expert navigation abilities. As the head of the Sinai Tribes Union Sheikh Ibrahim el-Manei said of the Peninsula's residents, "There is no development; the region has long been clinically dead...No wonder they have taken to arms and drugs trafficking, jihadism or crimes."²⁶

In 2012, former Egyptian President Morsi unveiled the Nahda ("renaissance") Project for the development of Egypt, dedicating one of its "four axes"²⁷ to the Sinai Development Plan. Although the plan correctly identified many of the critically underdeveloped sectors of the Peninsula, it

was vague in its specifics, lacking a timetable for implementation and any mechanisms to ensure Bedouin integration into new industries and jobs. It failed to address existing Bedouin land ownership claims, and a subsequent law opening land purchases to any single-nationality Egyptian citizen born to Egyptian parents was rejected by the Bedouin, many of whom do not have national identification cards to prove their nationality.²⁸ Moreover, as explained by Khaled Arafat, secretary general of North Sinai's al-Karama Nasserist party, "We don't have to prove we're Egyptian, we're already here. We are not waiting for someone to tell us we own this land.... We made this land Egyptian, from the south to the north... who are you to give me ownership to my own land?"²⁹

Despite Morsi's allocation of over 6 billion Egyptian pounds to the development of the Peninsula³⁰ and numerous promises³¹ of "urgent" implementation, few plans materialized. Many Bedouin lost faith in what they saw as the government's empty promises.

Sinai development must begin as soon as possible and in full consultation with the Bedouin to ensure that the state's limited resources are effectively funneled to the services and infrastructure most needed on the ground. Skeptics of this approach will understandably question Egypt's ability to fund such development amid its dire financial straits, yet the dividends that would accrue to the state from the development of the region and its natural resources would help jumpstart the now moribund Egyptian economy, as would the return of foreign investment and tourism. A small portion of the newly created jobs could be reserved for disgruntled, unemployed young graduates of Cairo and the Egyptian mainland. The international community also has a large role to play in this regard; in 2009, the US government awarded \$50 million for this purpose.³²

Such long term development will take time, as will its effects on arms trafficking. Yet if implemented consistently, inclusively, and accountably, development of the Sinai Peninsula is likely to become self-reinforcing. The more Bedouin are employed in local industry and agriculture, the greater their interests will be to protect and expand their newfound sources of income. Newly employed locals are unlikely to tolerate disruptions of their everyday lives and earning potential by armed attacks and ensuing security crackdowns. As the new beneficiaries of foreign investment, the Bedouin will have a strong interest in reigning in the smuggling gangs and jihadists whose activities unnerve foreign investors and tourists.

To be sure, few jobs will be able to compete with the soaring profits of arms trafficking, yet they offer different incentives, namely, a more stable and significantly safer source of income, especially during periods like the present, when the military has sealed most smuggling tunnels, bringing business in Rafah to a near halt.³³ Greater income stability, coupled with the construction and accessibility of new schools, will enable more families to send their children to school, keeping them away from smuggling gangs and contributing to a more skilled and educated workforce over the years.

Local development could also help reassert the tribal social norms that have been undermined in recent years by rapid socio-economic change and the rise of newly powerful armed gangs. As related by prominent Bedouin activist Musaad Abu Fagr, “Our customs and tribal laws have been ruined so it’s no wonder that many people here have turned into outlaws over the years.”³⁴ Together, stable economic opportunity, decreased exposure to radical Islamist ideology in Egyptian prisons, functioning state institutions to rival those of Salafis who have since stepped into the state vacuum,³⁵ and a revival of Bedouin tribal identity and social norms could serve as powerful countervailing forces against smuggling and jihad recruitment.

Integration

Although Sinai development would incentivize alternative livelihoods to arms smuggling, it alone is insufficient to stem the flow of arms; the Bedouin must be simultaneously and formally integrated into the security apparatus of the Peninsula. The reasons for this are twofold. One, on a psychological level, so long as the Bedouin feel threatened by the security forces, rival tribes and smuggling gangs, highwaymen, and jihadists, arms will remain in circulation. Two, operationally, only a force that integrates the Bedouin, works with and commands the respect of the local tribes, and understands both the cultural sensitivities and rugged terrain of the region is likely to succeed in obstructing arms trafficking.

For many years, the Bedouin were virtually barred from enlisting in the military and the security services. Staffed almost entirely by Nile Valley Egyptians, the heavy-handed security services have long been perceived as “invaders” and “conquerors,”³⁶ leading the Bedouin to take up arms in their perceived self-defense and to secure the release of their jailed brethren. Said one Bedouin leader from the Tarabeen tribe, “We have declared war against

the military and will not wait for them to kill us all...I personally have ten 14.5 mm anti-aircraft guns that I bought at \$12,000 a piece.”³⁷

Now, outmanned and outgunned, the few police that remain in Sinai have even less to offer the locals in the way of security. Stories abound of their helplessness and fear of armed gangs and jihadists,³⁸ and they have staged multiple protests themselves, calling for better security and improved weaponry.³⁹ As a result, locals have taken their security into their own hands. As one former arms smuggler explained, “The people won’t allow the police to come back until there’s an amnesty for Bedouin who’ve been wrongly prosecuted. How can you protect your life? You have to bear arms.”⁴⁰

A paradox has thus emerged: although the Bedouin demand improved regional security, they reject the presence of state security forces. To diffuse the pervasive sense of insecurity and taper the resulting demand for illicit arms, the Bedouin and Sinai residents must be integrated into the security forces in a manner that builds trust with the locals, thus legitimizing the forces and allowing them to resume their duties. Significantly, the Bedouin have indicated their interest in joining the security apparatus. According to the Sinai Rebels movement, 13 Sinai applicants were rejected from the Military Academy in 2012.⁴¹ Bedouin leaders often offer to mediate between the government and Sinai criminals, including during the hostage crisis this past May. As recalled by one young Bedouin from the Tawabeen tribe, “I offered to take part in ‘Operation Eagle,’ but they refused.”⁴²

The state should take advantage of this interest while it still exists. Tribal sheikhs have begun to voice concern about the growing “complications” of their mediation on behalf of the government during crises, citing criticism by fellow tribesmen for aiding a government that fails to fulfill its promises.⁴³ Last October, al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya released a statement that anyone who provided the security forces with “information and spies for them...is merely an apostate and deserves to be killed by us,” warning that “the treacherous agent will only get the sword.”⁴⁴ Since then, several tribal leaders and their relatives have been targeted.

Bedouin integration into the security services and the military would afford the latter the legitimacy and local tribal cooperation that is crucial to combating arms smuggling. As explained by Sheikh Salem Bin-Jirma of the Association of Arab Egyptian Tribes, only a force that includes the Bedouin would command the respect of the tribes “due to the presence of their children within it.”⁴⁵ Bedouin forces could serve as valuable interlocutors with the

tribal sheikhs and elders, building bridges to the local chieftains who can then obligate their respective tribes to cooperate. Counter-smuggling efforts would also benefit from Bedouin tracking abilities and familiarity with the local topography. As Sheikh Ali Freij, head of the Sinai tribes council and Arab Party for Justice and Equality argued in a May 24, 2013 interview, “It is necessary to fully re-establish security and include the people of Sinai in the security system. Sinai has a large area, and its people best know its trails and hideouts. It is impossible for any forces to achieve comprehensive security in Sinai without integrating the people into the security system.”⁴⁶

The integration of Bedouin into the Sinai security structure can and should take place alongside the development of the region. Although their effects will not be immediate, the initiation of this process will likely have a positive, albeit fragile, impact on Bedouin-state relations in the short term and improve counter-terrorism efforts by the security forces in the interim.

The Fusion of “Hard” and “Soft” Power

The “soft power” disincentivization of arms smuggling outlined above is not a substitute for the “hard power” security measures already employed in the Sinai Peninsula. A full description of these measures is beyond the scope of this paper, but they include such tactics as tunnel demolitions, tightened border security, improved intelligence, and arrests (with due process) of known smugglers. The international community can improve these operations by providing counter-smuggling and counter-insurgency technology and training. Currently, the Egyptian military is equipped and trained for conventional inter-state war.

The hard and soft power approaches must be used in tandem; the former can target and imprison smuggling kingpins from the top, while the latter can syphon off their support from the bottom. Fusing together these two approaches will also enhance the efficacy of each. Bedouin seeking to restore security to their lands can provide valuable intelligence to counter-smuggling efforts by the military and security services. Conversely, the security services can use innovative social campaigns to involve the community in its arms control efforts. For example, many Bedouin complain about the smuggling into Gaza of commodities that are scarce within their own communities, such as fuel. Mobilizing the community against fuel smuggling could produce spillover benefits for the fight against arms smuggling. By factoring out

such common interests between the community and arms control efforts, the state can broaden the realm of possible community-state partnerships.

Demilitarization and Arms Collection

The development of the Sinai Peninsula and tribal-state security partnerships will take time. In the long run, however, they could create favorable conditions for arms collection programs. In order to prevent arms exchange programs from generating new demands for arms and inadvertently fueling the trade, these programs should take place alongside improved policing and border control measures. The Bedouin will prove critical to these efforts, but only once their grievances are addressed and their security ensured. Only when they feel that the collection and destruction of weaponry will enhance – rather than detract from – their security will their motivational balance begin to tip in favor of arms control. Indeed, according to media reports, the primary tribes to answer a recent military call for unlicensed weapons were those whose territories lie in the west and the south, areas that have seen significantly less conflict and violence than in the volatile north.⁴⁷ There are a number of examples of creative, civil society-based initiatives that states around the world have successfully employed to encourage locals to relinquish illicit arms.

In August 2012, the UN launched a new set of International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS) to provide “clear, practical and comprehensive guidance to practitioners and policymakers on fundamental aspects of small arms and light weapons control...[and] built upon best practices elaborated at regional and sub-regional levels.”⁴⁸ Its weapons-for-development model, which offers an increase in ongoing development in exchange for weapons, could form the basis for a Sinai weapons collection program. By offering attractive but non-crucial assistance, such as advanced school equipment and medical facilities instead of monetary rewards, it would prevent cash handouts from being used to fuel illicit activities. Moreover, it would benefit the community as a whole, rather than rewarding individual offenders. It would also work well with the Bedouin tribal structure, which could pressure individuals to turn in their weapons for the benefit of the collective.

Weapons-for-development initiatives have enjoyed limited success in countries such as Albania, where the program resulted in the collection and destruction of around 16,000 small arms and light weapons.⁴⁹ Yet they are most effective when backed by public support, as demonstrated by the events

in Libya in September 2012. After the revolution, the Libyan government implemented a number of incentive-based disarmament schemes with little success, including buy-back programs and weapons-for-jobs exchanges.⁵⁰ However, in the wake of the September 11, 2012 militia attack on the US consulate in Benghazi and the death of Ambassador Christopher Stevens, thousands of protesters took to the streets to demand the demilitarization and disbanding of armed militias. Several days later, over one thousand Libyans⁵¹ turned in over 600 different types of arms⁵² at an army collection drive, including anti-aircraft guns, rocket and missile launchers, landmines, and even tanks.

Conclusion

Given the administrative and security disarray in Sinai and the power now wielded by the Bedouin, any state approach to arms control in the region must integrate the population. No military operation can provide a long term solution to a phenomenon that is rooted in civil society's socio-economic and political grievances.

Of course, the implementation of the above recommendations depends on the political will of the Egyptian government, now de facto ruled by the military. The military missed its opportunity for reforms during its previous rule; it should not make the same mistake twice. Given the widespread unrest and violence in mainland Egypt at the moment, it can hardly afford to fight on two fronts at once. Its standing may also be at stake, as Sinai is increasingly seen as a test of the military's – and by extension, the state's – ability to provide stability.

Now is the time for the military to offer the Bedouin a deal – one that includes the development of the Peninsula and integration of the Bedouin into the regional security structure, but which also allows “hard” security measures such as tunnel destruction to continue apace. Giving the Bedouin a stake in Sinai development and security will incentivize local pushback against destabilizing phenomena such as arms trafficking and jihadist groups. The restoration of a sense of regional security will taper the domestic demand for arms and encourage foreign investment and tourism. Alternative economic livelihoods will syphon off would-be smuggling recruits, while tunnel destruction and arrests by a more knowledgeable, legitimate, and therefore more effective security force will significantly raise the costs of smuggling. Taken together, this approach could favorably alter the context in

which future arms control measures take place, such as weapons collection drives. It could also provide a blueprint for civil society-based approaches to arms control elsewhere in the world.

However, there is no magic formula that will guarantee the success of this approach; it must remain flexible, capable of adapting to the complex and fluid conditions in which it will be implemented. For example, many Bedouin may refuse to join the security services until the government agrees to grant amnesty to Sinai residents who were imprisoned or convicted in absentia under Mubarak.⁵³ The military may also be forced to open the Rafah border crossing for the flow of commercial goods to replace the lost livelihoods of tunnel operators. The military must not allow such demands to obstruct the process, but rather discuss – and if necessary, negotiate – them in parallel. Momentum is paramount; amid the highly flammable current climate of resentment and distrust, any significant disruption in the development and integration of Bedouin society would risk outbreak of renewed conflict, setting back the process and making the future rebuilding of trust all the more difficult.

There are certain steps that the international community can take to encourage the military to tackle the challenges posed by Sinai. For example, the US could earmark a determined portion of its military aid to Egypt for the purchase of hi-tech, counter-terrorism technologies that will be of greater use in Sinai than F-16s and M1A1 Abrams tanks, and even apply a “use it or lose it” time limit. Many other countries with significant interests in securing the international shipping lane through the Suez Canal might also be persuaded to pressure the military to do more for Sinai security. As recently as September 1, 2013, a Panama-flagged cargo ship was attacked as it passed through the canal.

With or without international pressure however, the military’s hand may be forced, either by high-profile embarrassments, such as jihadis’ ambush and execution of 25 off-duty Egyptian policeman in August 2013, or by cross-border jihadist activities that threaten to drag Egypt into conflict with Israel. The Sinai-launched rocket that the Iron Dome intercepted over Eilat on August 13, 2013 was not the first to target an Israeli population center, nor presumably will it be the last. Israel has thus far shown restraint, preferring to authorize greater Egyptian military deployments in the demilitarized zone of the Peninsula, as required by the Camp David Accords. Yet the greater the number or lethality of the attacks, the more pressure will build

on the Israeli government to respond, as was likely the case with the August 9, 2013 alleged Israeli drone strike against Sinai militants preparing to launch a rocket into Israel. On the one hand, coordinating its response with the Egyptian military (as Israel evidently did with the drone strike) could prevent the two militaries from being inadvertently drawn into conflict. On the other hand, the two militaries' cooperation drew scathing criticism from the Egyptian public that, if repeated, could seriously damage the military's standing. In either scenario, then, the Egyptian military loses from Israeli involvement in Sinai. The urgency of the deteriorating situation therefore require the military's interference sooner, rather than later.

Until the Bedouin are recruited to become partners in their own security, the Sinai Peninsula will remain a battleground between the competing interests of the state and the local population. The time is ripe for action, and the burden rests now with Egypt.

Notes

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