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## Security Challenges in Egypt Two Years After Morsi

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Madam Chair, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the subcommittee: it is an honor to appear here to discuss security in Egypt.

For the past thirty-five years, Egypt has been a pillar of the U.S. strategic architecture in the Middle East. Amidst turbulence that has so far seen four regional states fail, the stability of Egypt—and the continued pro-West orientation of Cairo—has taken on added importance for the United States. While the increasingly repressive trajectory of President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi's Egypt should be a concern for Washington, the ongoing deterioration of security in Egypt is the more immediate threat. In October 2015, the Islamic State's apparent downing of a Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula drew international attention to the problem. The reality, however, is that terrorism in Egypt is not confined to the Sinai. Terrorism in Egypt has traversed the Suez Canal and is taking root in the Nile Valley.

Despite difficulties in the bilateral relationship, Egypt remains a critical U.S. partner in the Middle East. In addition to the ongoing strategic benefits of the relationship—including more than two thousand U.S. overflights and priority Suez Canal access for nearly a hundred U.S. warships and submarines per year—Egypt is one of two Arab states at peace with Israel. Washington and Cairo also share a common threat from Islamic militancy. Given the importance of the relationship, U.S. interests in the region would be best served by a stable Egypt. To this end, Washington can play a productive role in helping Cairo reestablish security.

### **Sinai Background**

Security in the 23,000-square-mile sparsely populated and underserved Sinai Peninsula was a problem long before the presidency of Mohamed Morsi.<sup>1</sup> But in recent years, the situation has reached a crisis point. Jihadists exploited the breakdown in security after Mubarak was toppled in 2011, initially targeting Israel to

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent, highly detailed overview of the origins of Wilayat Sinai and jihadism in the Sinai, see Mokhtar Awad and Samuel Tadros, "Bay'a Remorse? Wilayat Sinai and the Nile Valley," *CTC Sentinel*, August 21, 2015, <http://www.hudson.org/research/11548-bay-a-remorse-wilayat-sinai-and-the-nile-valley>.

stoke Egypt-Israel tensions. After Morsi's ouster in 2013, however, the militants turned their guns on the Egyptian government.

The Egyptian military started its campaign against Sinai-based jihadists in 2013, essentially from scratch, because it had few intelligence assets in the Peninsula, and limited experience in modern counterinsurgency, or COIN, operations. More than two years into this operation, the Egyptian military still hasn't defeated a handful of terrorist organizations estimated to have fewer than two thousand members.

Historically, security in the Sinai was the responsibility of the *Mukhabarat*, Egypt's General Intelligence Directorate (GID). For decades, under the GID, Egyptian security forces, tourists, and international peacekeepers in the Sinai were periodically targeted by terrorists. Most prominently, between 2004 and 2006, networks of Bedouin and Palestinian militants carried out a series of high-profile attacks on the Sinai's top Red Sea resort destinations—Sharm al-Sheikh, Taba, and Dahab—killing more than a hundred foreigners and Egyptians. So long as the Sinai remained relatively quiet, however, Egyptian authorities permitted the territory's 500,000 mostly Bedouin residents to continue their activities, including their lucrative smuggling operations to Israel, Jordan, and Gaza.

After Mubarak's ouster, the military replaced the Mukhabarat as the lead agency for security in the Sinai, and the situation deteriorated. A combination of factors seems to have contributed to the subsequent decline in Sinai security. Perhaps most damaging, the Egyptian military has proven ill-equipped to deal with the burgeoning security challenges in the Sinai, which at least initially were primarily an intelligence—rather than a kinetic military—problem.

Beyond the issue of competence, the problem has been compounded by: (1) the toppling of Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi, and the start of a steady stream of heavy Libyan weapons flowing to the Sinai; (2) the freeing of jihadists from Egyptian jails—many of whom reportedly relocated to the Peninsula—by the transitional military government;<sup>2</sup> (3) Morsi's close ties with Hamas in Gaza, and his lenient attitude toward smuggling of personnel and materiel between Gaza and Sinai; (4) the Sisi administration's crackdown on smuggling with Gaza and Israel's construction of a border fence, which diminished traditional Bedouin revenue sources; and (5) the rise in Iraq and Syria of the Islamic State (IS) and the reinvigoration of regional jihadist movements.

### **The Current Deterioration**

Over the past four years, these factors exacerbated endemic security issues, and sporadic terrorist incidents in the Sinai morphed into a full-scale insurgency. Early on, many of the strikes targeted the natural gas pipeline from Egypt to Israel and Jordan. Between Mubarak's ouster in 2011 and August 2014, the pipeline was bombed twenty-four times. But the real deterioration came in the summer of 2013. The removal from power that July of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohamed Morsi, by the military saw a spike in terrorist activity in the Sinai, with the frequency of attacks against police and military targets increasing exponentially. The month Morsi was toppled, there were nearly ninety terrorist attacks in the Sinai. Less than a month later, in August, twenty-five off-duty policemen were reportedly taken off buses and executed near the northern border town of Rafah.

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<sup>2</sup> Jay Newton-Small, "How Egypt's Sinai Peninsula Figures in the Gaza Turmoil," *Time*, November 15, 2012, <http://swampland.time.com/2012/11/15/how-egypts-sinai-peninsula-figures-in-the-gaza-turmoil/>.

Reflexively, the government of Egypt attributed these acts of terrorism to the Brotherhood, which was banned following the coup that brought Sisi to power. While the organization has not explicitly taken credit for specific acts of terrorism—and Cairo has yet to provide credible evidence to support its accusations—a January 2015 statement on the Brotherhood’s website did call for “a long, uncompromising jihad” against the Sisi regime. While the Brotherhood may have sympathized with the violence in the Sinai, though, the organization was clearly not perpetrating the vast majority of the assaults.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, evidence suggests other Islamist militant groups have been responsible for the majority of the Sinai violence. Small, previously unknown terrorist organizations started to carry out operations in the Peninsula shortly after the 2011 revolution. In August 2013, for example, a Sinai-based al-Qaeda affiliate called Kataib al-Furqan claimed credit and posted on YouTube video footage of its rocket-propelled grenade assault on a cargo vessel traversing the Suez Canal. Although the vessel did not sustain significant damage, the group pledged to continue targeting canal shipping, and continued to perpetrate small-scale attacks against military and police targets.

After October 2013, Kataib al-Furqan basically disappeared, and soon after, another group, called Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, emerged and started to carry out its own attacks on Sinai targets. A year later, in November 2014, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, and changed its name to Wilayat Sinai—the so-called Sinai Province. This new affiliation was accompanied by a series of lethal and spectacular attacks by the group, targeting police stations, checkpoints, military installations, and tourists on an almost daily basis.

The best statistics on terrorist attacks in the Sinai—and, in fact, documenting attacks throughout all of Egypt—have been aggregated by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP).<sup>4</sup> The numbers are staggering. In 2014, in northern Sinai, where the vast majority of the violence occurred, TIMEP recorded nearly 150 terrorist incidents. In 2015, the grim tally will almost certainly surpass 400 terrorist attacks.

But the statistics don’t tell the whole story. To be sure, Wilayat Sinai operations in the Sinai demonstrate a high level of commitment, but they also suggest an organization with increasingly dangerous capabilities. During the group’s July 2015 “Ramadan offensive,” Wilayat Sinai simultaneously assaulted fifteen army and police positions in the town of Sheikh Zuwaid, deploying three suicide bombers to target two checkpoints and an officers’ club in al-Arish, killing nearly seventy government forces in a single day.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to tactical coordination, Wilayat Sinai and its antecedent have successfully employed cutting-edge weaponry against the Egyptian military on the battlefield. Among the more worrisome munitions in the group’s arsenal are MANPADs, likely to include the SA-18, which has a ceiling of 11,000 feet. In January 2014, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis claimed credit for downing an Egyptian M-117 helicopter in northern Sinai with a surface-to-air weapon, killing five crewmen. The IS affiliate also possesses the highly advanced Russian Kornet antitank weapons, which it reportedly employed to sink an Egyptian warship anchored off the Peninsula’s Mediterranean coast in June 2015. Had Kataib al-Furqan deployed this system back in October

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<sup>3</sup> Morsi supporters have been implicated in low-profile attacks on infrastructure, including roads and electricity towers, as well as police stations.

<sup>4</sup> See the Institute’s website: <http://timep.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> Avi Issacharoff, “Death Toll Rises to 70 in Jihadist Attacks in Egypt’s Sinai,” *Times of Israel*, July 1, 2015, [http://www.timesofisrael.com/egypt-jets-strike-islamic-state-after-jihadists-kill-50/?fb\\_comment\\_id=787004408081386\\_787282451386915#f1da46bf04](http://www.timesofisrael.com/egypt-jets-strike-islamic-state-after-jihadists-kill-50/?fb_comment_id=787004408081386_787282451386915#f1da46bf04).

2013, it might have scuttled a ship in the Suez Canal, blocking international shipping and interrupting a critical source of Egyptian revenues.

Cairo historically has been willing to tolerate relatively low levels of persistent violence in the Sinai, but the current levels of lethality and frequency of attacks are excessive, even by Egyptian standards. The October 2015 attack on the Russian civilian airliner, which killed 224 passengers and crew, only made matters worse.

Sharm al-Sheikh had been a relative bright spot in Egypt's ailing tourism environment. The attack had an immediate negative impact on the tourism industry, and by extension the Egyptian economy. At the same time, the incident embarrassed Cairo, drawing attention to the ongoing insurgency and exposing serious gaps in state security. Compounding matters, Egypt continues to deny the possibility that a bomb or terrorism was responsible for the crash.<sup>6</sup> The refusal to recognize the nature of the problem—much like Egypt did following a suicide pilot's 1999 intentional destruction of EgyptAir Flight 990, which killed 217—does not inspire confidence that Cairo will take steps to rectify airport security issues.

Potentially further complicating matters for Cairo are recent reports that the Islamic State's Sinai military commander Shadi al-Menai traveled in December to Gaza for talks with Hamas military wing (Izz-al-Din al-Qassam Brigades) leaders. While it is unclear what was discussed at the meetings, weapons smuggling cooperation was likely on the table.

### **The MFO at Risk**

While Egyptian security forces and tourists are the principal targets of terrorists in the Sinai, international peacekeepers monitoring the security provisions of the Egypt-Israel treaty have also increasingly been threatened. Since 1982, the Multinational Force and Observers, or MFO, has been deployed in the Sinai. The MFO has 1,667 military personnel supplied by twelve countries and seventeen civilian officials. But the United States is the heart and soul of the organization. Between the infantry battalion task force, the logistics unit that provides aircraft and conducts air operations, and other staff, the United States contributes nearly seven hundred personnel to the MFO.<sup>7</sup>

To be sure, the MFO was targeted prior to 2011—in 2005, for example, an MFO vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb; a year later, another vehicle was targeted by a suicide bomber—but since 2011 the operational tempo of military actions against the troops is increasing.

In March 2012, a band of armed tribesmen surrounded the MFO camp at al-Gorah for eight days, demanding the release of Bedouin imprisoned for the 2004 Taba and 2005 Sharm al-Sheikh bombings. A month later, a group of Bedouin detained an MFO vehicle between two checkpoints. In September 2012, dozens of Bedouin attacked, infiltrated, and overran the MFO's North Camp, firing automatic weapons and tossing grenades, and wounding four peacekeepers before a stand-down was negotiated. Then, in April 2013, a Hungarian peacekeeper was kidnapped by tribesmen and subsequently released. More recently, in August 2014, a member of the U.S. contingent was shot and wounded by an unknown gunman near the camp, and in June 2015, the MFO's airport adjacent to North Camp was shelled.

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<sup>6</sup> "No Signs of Terrorism' in Russian Airplane Crash, Say Egypt's Preliminary Investigators," *Egyptian Streets*, December 14, 2015, <http://egyptianstreets.com/2015/12/14/no-signs-of-terrorism-in-russian-airplane-crash-say-egypts-preliminary-investigations/>.

<sup>7</sup> David Schenker, "America's Least-Known Mideast Military Force," *Politico*, November 1, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/11/sinai-crash-americas-least-known-mideast-military-force-213314#ixzz3tqLDxSFf>.

In August 2015, after an improvised explosive device (IED) planted by the Islamic State wounded six MFO troops—four Americans and two Fijians—the Obama administration undertook a policy review and subsequently dispatched an additional seventy-five troops to assist with force-protection duties. The MFO has also since modified its monitoring deployments to better protect the Sinai force. Despite precautions and the modified mission contours, the MFO remains a target of Sinai-based militants.

## **Nile Valley**

As bad as the situation is in the Sinai, however, this area's problems represent perhaps the least of Cairo's worries. Over the past two years, what began as a battle for the Sinai has shifted in geographic focus. Terrorism has traversed the Suez Canal, moving west from Egypt's periphery to its heartland. Today, most terrorist incidents in Egypt are occurring not in the Peninsula but in the Nile Valley—in Cairo, Alexandria, Faiyum, and other cities along the Nile River—where 95 percent of Egypt's 90 million citizens reside.

In 2014, more than three hundred attacks were perpetrated in Egypt outside the Sinai; nearly double that have occurred in 2015. These terrorist attacks have included routine drive-by shootings, grenade attacks, and the detonation of IEDs. In 2015, Egypt also saw attacks on trains, buses, textile factories, banks, military checkpoints, state security buildings, and judges' clubs in Nile basin cities and towns. This past summer, in a particularly resonant event, Egypt's chief prosecutor, Hisham Barakat, was assassinated in a Cairo car bomb. And on at least one occasion in 2015, a suicide bomber attempted to target tourists in Luxor, killing two policemen on June 15.

The connection between Sinai and Nile Valley terrorism was underscored in August 2015 when a Croatian worker kidnapped outside Cairo was subsequently beheaded in the Peninsula by Wilayat Sinai.

Increasingly, Egypt today resembles the country in the 1990s, when the state battled a pernicious and persistent insurgency led by al-Gamaa al-Islamiyah. During that decade, the Islamic Group—led by the blind cleric Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman—wreaked havoc in Egypt, targeting policemen, government officials, Coptic Christians, and tourists, killing more than 1,200.

These days, terrorist operations west of the Suez are being perpetrated by a diverse group of organizations. Not only are attacks being committed by al-Qaeda and IS affiliates, they are also being carried out by non-Islamist revolutionary groups such as Ajnad Misr, the Popular Resistance Movement, and Revolutionary Punishment. The principal targets of these attacks are Egyptian government and security officials, but these organizations are also targeting tourists, infrastructure, and property, with an eye toward undermining the country's already feeble economy.

There is little doubt the terrorism is damaging Egypt's economic outlook. Tourism and foreign direct investment, two pillars of Egypt's economy, were not doing particularly well before the recent uptick in terrorism. The spike in violence is dissuading all but the most intrepid tourists. To wit, in early December, the Men's World Team Squash Championship was canceled because even Cairo was deemed too unsafe.<sup>8</sup> In 2010, tourism accounted for nearly 23 percent of Egypt's current account receipts; by 2014, this figure had dipped to just 10 percent.<sup>9</sup> Given the current trajectory, it would not be surprising if Egypt's projected 4.3 percent GDP

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<sup>8</sup> "World Squash Championship Called Off in Egypt for Security Reasons," *Egypt Independent*, December 4, 2015, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/world-squash-championship-egypt-called-security-reasons>.

<sup>9</sup> "Can Increased FDI Inflows Make Up for Tourism Losses?" *Economist Intelligence Unit*, November 27, 2015.

growth for 2016 were soon downgraded. In 2015, Egypt's GDP growth will only be about 4 percent, a rate inadequate to create sufficient jobs for the state's swelling population.

### **Lack of Visibility and Collateral Damage**

In recent years, the Egyptian government as a matter of policy has tried to prevent journalists from covering developments in the Sinai. Initially, Cairo portrayed this limitation as safety related. As the insurgency dragged on, however, the press ban has increasingly been seen in Egypt and the West as an effort to conceal military losses and human rights abuses.

In June 2015, after severe discrepancies between the press accounts and the official military figures on Egyptian casualties during the Islamic State's Sheikh Zuwaid campaign, Cairo issued a draconian new Counterterrorism Law imposing a two-year minimum sentence on journalists for "reporting false information on terrorist attacks which contradict official statements."<sup>10</sup> The law applies to both local and foreign journalists. These government restrictions have made it almost impossible to ascertain certain basic facts about the trajectory of the Sinai insurgency.

At present, there are no official statistics available, for example, on the number of Egyptian security officials killed in the Sinai. There is also no official tally of militants killed. Perhaps most concerning, there is no publicly available data on the number of civilians killed, the collateral damage of Egypt's counterinsurgency campaign in the Sinai. Based on the available reporting, however, Egyptian military and civilian casualties in the Sinai could be quite high. It is widely estimated, for example, that more than a thousand Egyptian police, military, and border security personnel have been killed in the Sinai in recent years.

Collateral damage is harder to measure, but it also appears to be severe. Anecdotes and eyewitness accounts emerging from the Sinai suggest a scorched-earth campaign against the Islamists, with high levels of collateral damage, civilian casualties, and destruction of property and housing.<sup>11</sup> In addition to unintentional damage, Egypt has undertaken the large-scale demolition of hundreds of houses and apartments in Rafah, along the border with Gaza, in an effort to prevent smuggling via tunnels. According to Human Rights Watch, the forced eviction of 3,200 families—many of whom reportedly never received government compensation—may have "violated international law."<sup>12</sup>

At a minimum, the tack has engendered the anger of many additional Sinai residents, adding to the pool of potential militants. According to Egyptian journalist Mohannad Sabry, the military's heavy-handed tactics in the Sinai appear to be fueling support for terrorism. As Sabry noted in July 2015:

There have been several reports from villages near Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah that dozens of people—criminals, moderate Salafists, victims of the turmoil—have joined WS [Wilayat Sinai]. One source

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<sup>10</sup> "Egypt's Journalists' Syndicate Says New Anti-terror Law Will Curtail Press Freedom," *Abram Online*, July 5, 2015, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/134619/Egypt/0/Egypt-journalists-syndicate-says-new-antiterror-l.aspx>.

<sup>11</sup> David Schenker, "Apaches in the Sinai," Policy Alert (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 16, 2014), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/apaches-in-the-sinai>.

<sup>12</sup> Elsa Buchanan, "Egypt: Campaign to Fight ISIS in Sinai May Have Violated International Law, Says Human Rights Watch," *International Business Times*, September 22, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/egypt-campaign-fight-isis-sinai-may-have-violated-international-law-says-human-rights-watch-1520653>.

told me that, until late 2013, there were just five members of ABM [Ansar Beit al-Maqdis] in his village. After 90% of the village was destroyed by government forces in a security campaign, some 40 people from the town carry weapons on WS' behalf.<sup>13</sup>

While it is difficult to verify Sabry's assessment, the general sentiment rings true. Although Egyptian officials routinely say that the state is "winning" in Sinai, four years on Egypt does not appear to be making progress toward containing or rolling back the Sinai insurgency. Worse, the ubiquitous reports of collateral damage raise the specter that Egypt may be making more terrorists—or terrorist sympathizers—than they are killing.

A significant part of the problem is how Egypt is waging its counterinsurgency campaign. As one former senior official in a friendly regional state described it, the tactics Egypt is employing in the Sinai are the opposite of the hard-learned best practices in modern counterinsurgency operations. "If you had a list of boxes that you check of things not to do," he said, "the Egyptian military has checked every one of those boxes."

Instead of being swift, mobile, and agile, they are slow and static. Instead of being grassroots-oriented, they want sophisticated air defenses. Instead of living with the population, they take their military and put them off in barracks that are isolated. Rather than strengthening civil society, they are in there crushing all those that support or allow insurgents to work inside society.<sup>14</sup>

Given this environment, it is perhaps not surprising that the new counterterrorism law—which includes provisions for fast-tracked trials in special courts for terrorism suspects, mandatory sentencing for Internet terrorism incitement, and life sentences for financing terrorism—is having no discernible positive impact.

Indeed, many Egyptians see the new counterterrorism law as focused more on limiting personal freedoms and public relations damage than on curtailing the threat. While Egyptians—craving stability after four years of continuous revolution and violence—appear to be broadly sympathetic to their government, it is unclear how long their patience will last, especially if the economy does not dramatically improve.

## **Recommendations**

No doubt, Egypt is situated in a difficult neighborhood. To the west is the failed state of Libya; to the south is a failing state in Sudan; and to the east, Egypt is contending with a burgeoning insurgency in the Sinai and a Hamas (Muslim Brotherhood) controlled Gaza. Yet in many ways, Egypt does not appear to be taking even the most obvious steps necessary to better secure the state. Consider that although Egypt complains incessantly about weapons flowing in from Libya, it has not prioritized funding border-security measures on that frontier.

Egypt's domestic counterterrorism capabilities are likewise lacking. The GID emerged from the 2011 revolution in a weakened state, and still hasn't apparently fully recovered. If the accidental killing of eight Mexican tourists in the Western Desert in September 2015 is any indication, intelligence gathering and communications between the military and other domestic security agencies is also a real problem. Clearly,

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<sup>13</sup> "Assault in Sheikh Zuweid: A Turning Point in Egypt's Fight against Terrorism," Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, July 2, 2015, <http://timep.org/commentary/assault-in-sheikh-zuwaid-a-turning-point-in-egypts-fight-against-terrorism/>.

<sup>14</sup> Interview recounted by Gregory B. Craig, "A More Constructive U.S. Egypt Policy," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, video, 39:00, November 10, 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/cooperating-not-condoning-toward-a-more-constructive-u.s.-egypt-policy>.

intelligence gathering remains a serious deficit in the Sinai as well, even though cooperation with the Israelis is reportedly helping fill some gaps.

The security challenges faced by Egypt are enormous, and at present Cairo is not up to the task. Given the regional deterioration, the continued stability and security of Egypt should be a priority for the United States. There is much that Washington, working with Cairo, can do to help mitigate the threats. These steps might include:

**Counterterrorism training.** With Israel's permission, Egypt has deployed thousands of troops, along with dozens of armored vehicles, tanks, helicopters, and fixed-wing aircraft, into the Sinai to fight the insurgency. But Egypt's heavy-handed and purely military approach has not succeeded, and is unlikely to succeed. It's not a problem of manpower—it's a problem of tactics. For more than a decade, the United States has been conducting counterinsurgency operations against Islamist militants, and has learned valuable lessons in the process that Egypt, a major non-NATO ally, should benefit from. Cairo has historically been resistant to accepting advice. Washington has to make Egypt an offer of COIN training—in Egypt, the United States, or a third location—it can't refuse, creatively incentivizing the instruction and adoption of a new approach to counterinsurgency operations.

**Developing the Sinai.** Egypt's Sinai counterinsurgency approach is one-dimensional, but successful COIN campaigns have both civilian and military aspects. Problems in the Sinai didn't start with the Islamic State; the region has long been underserved, peripheralized, and unhappy with Cairo. The arrival of al-Qaeda and IS, and the breakdown of traditional tribal bonds, has only exacerbated the foment, and the collateral civilian damage meted out by the army is seemingly making matters worse. Absent economic and educational opportunities, the Sinai will continue to prove fertile ground for jihadist recruitment. In tandem with battling the insurgency, Washington should join with Cairo and other regional partners to invest in the Sinai, beyond the hotels of Sharm al-Sheikh.

**Leveraging the Gulf.** Washington has had little success in incentivizing improvements in Egyptian governance or modifications in military tactics by conditioning assistance dollars. It's possible that U.S. allies in the Gulf—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait—which are currently underwriting Egypt's budget, would have more luck pressing Cairo to prioritize Sinai economic development and adopt modern COIN techniques. The U.S. administration should be engaging with its Arab Gulf allies to help convince Egypt of the wisdom of these two initiatives.

**Increasing visibility.** Egypt has been loath to allow journalists or other outside observers—including U.S. military officials from the Defense Attache's office at the U.S. embassy in Cairo—into the Peninsula. It would be helpful if U.S. strategists had more visibility regarding the situation on the ground in the Sinai. If Egypt were ever amenable, this could set the stage for a more robust U.S. advisory presence. Additionally, because Egypt is deploying U.S.-origin weapons systems in the fight, as accusations of human rights abuses mount, it will be important to either substantiate or refute the claims. This will require the presence of journalists on the ground.

**Securing the border with Libya.** The Obama administration has pressed Egypt to reprogram some of its \$1.3 billion in annual Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to deploy equipment and systems to help better secure the

long, porous, and dangerous frontier between Egypt and Libya. Egypt has thus far refused.<sup>15</sup> Egypt's atavistic attachment to expensive legacy systems—like F-16s, M1A1 tanks, and Harpoon missiles—with only marginal utility in the current threat environment is undermining state security. There is little appetite in Congress for increasing Egypt's \$1.3 billion in annual FMF. Washington has to do better in cajoling a recalcitrant Egypt into devoting financial resources to aerostat balloons, C4ISR systems,<sup>16</sup> and even Black Hawk helicopters for rapid troop response to threats.

**Sweetening the pot.** Convincing Egypt to slow the purchase of extremely costly prestige weapons systems will be difficult. If disclosure permits, perhaps Washington could encourage Cairo to do so by offering to sell other high-value/high-prestige weapons systems, including armed drones, which would benefit operations along the Libyan border and over the Sinai.

**Boosting dialogue on Libya.** There is a complete disconnect between Cairo and Washington on Libya. Washington is backing talks between factions in Libya that Cairo believes have no chance of succeeding. Egypt believes Libyan Gen. Khalifa Haftar's Operation Dignity militia is the most moderate local military force and worthy of materiel support. Twice in recent years, Egypt has taken military action in Libya against IS without first notifying Washington.<sup>17</sup> Increased understanding—and perhaps coordination—on Libya may be a more productive course of action, particularly in terms of future intelligence sharing.

**Encouraging more Israel-Egypt cooperation.** In August 2013, an Israeli drone operating with permission in Egyptian airspace reportedly killed five Islamist militants in the Peninsula. The quiet Israel-Egypt cooperation in the Sinai has been one of the few bright spots in the region, but it remains sensitive. Israel has advanced intelligence and kinetic capabilities to assist Egypt in counterinsurgency operations in the Sinai. The United States should continue to encourage this cooperation, and urge Sisi to deepen it from the highest echelons to the working levels.

**Improving Egyptian airport security.** Despite Cairo's reluctance to concede a bomb may have downed the Russian airliner over Sinai in October, the United States, Egypt, and the international community all have an interest in addressing concerns over airport security in Egypt. As the *New York Times* reported in November, European officials "have repeatedly complained that X-ray and explosive-detection equipment used to scan baggage is out of date, poorly maintained or poorly operated by inadequately trained staff members."<sup>18</sup> This is a problem that Western financial and technical support can and should help solve.

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<sup>15</sup> In June 2015, the author asked an Egyptian general why Egypt needed so many F-16s for its counterterrorism campaign. Wouldn't some of these funds be better spent to secure the border with Libya? The general said that like the United States, which was using F-16s to fight the Islamic State in Syria, Egypt needed this asset to contend with its own IS problem.

<sup>16</sup> Command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

<sup>17</sup> David Kirkpatrick, "Egypt Launches Airstrike in Libya against ISIS Branch," *New York Times*, February 16, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/17/world/middleeast/isis-egypt-libya-airstrikes.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/17/world/middleeast/isis-egypt-libya-airstrikes.html?_r=1). Patrick Kingsley, Chris Stephen, and Dan Roberts, "UAE and Egypt behind Bombing Raids against Libyan Militias, Say U.S. Officials," *Guardian*, August 26, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/26/united-arab-emirates-bombing-raids-libyan-militias>.

<sup>18</sup> Kareem Fahim, David K. Kirkpatrick, and Nicola Clark, "Gaps in Egyptian Airport Security Face Scrutiny after Crash," *New York Times*, November 7, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/08/world/middleeast/gaps-in-egyptian-airport-security-face-scrutiny-after-crash.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/08/world/middleeast/gaps-in-egyptian-airport-security-face-scrutiny-after-crash.html?_r=0).

**Preventing further unproductive delays.** In 2013, a congressional hold delayed the transfer of ten Apache attack helicopters for use in Egypt's counterinsurgency for a full year. The attack helicopter armed with Hellfire missiles is a preferred Egyptian platform for Sinai operations, and the Egyptian leadership was furious over the delay. Indeed, it confirmed to much of the top military leadership the conspiracy theory that Washington was supporting a return to power of the Muslim Brotherhood. While there were clearly reasons for holding the delivery, this tack did not serve U.S. or Egyptian interests. In the future, if the United States feels the need to withhold weapons systems for Egypt, the United States should be careful not to pick counterinsurgency tools.

**Avoiding the leveraging of U.S. military assistance.** While it doesn't seem like Egypt is taking the terrorism problem seriously, evidence suggests that the Sisi administration sees it as a grave threat. Cairo's human rights policies are problematic and perhaps even counterproductive to the state's long-term stability. But a cutoff in U.S. assistance will neither improve Cairo's conduct nor enhance the already fraught U.S.-Egypt relationship. Indeed, precedent suggests that withholding assistance would aggravate—not moderate—the worst tendencies in Egyptian governance.<sup>19</sup> To get what it wants from Egypt, the United States must be more creative—perhaps by floating the prospect of reintroducing early disbursement of aid, or selling Cairo unprecedented equipment, like drones. Now that Egypt is receiving billions in Gulf funding per year—including substantial military aid—Washington is no longer the only game in town.

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<sup>19</sup> For example, between October 2013 and December 2014, when U.S. funding was conditioned on democratic progress, Cairo passed a draconian new anti-protest law, implemented a more restrictive NGO law, and witnessed Sisi win the presidential election with 97 percent of the popular vote.