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SINAI SECURITY:
OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNLIKELY
COOPERATION AMONG EGYPT,
ISRAEL, AND HAMAS

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INTRODUCTION

On August 18, 2011, *Salafi-jihadis* crossed the international boundary from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and attacked an Israeli bus on its way to the southern city of Eilat. Eight were killed, and the responding Israel Defense Forces (IDF) came under fire during a complex, multi-stage operation.¹ In hot pursuit of the terrorist infiltrators—dressed in Egyptian fatigues—the IDF killed several real Egyptian border guards.² The details of the Egyptians' deaths were disputed at the time, but the reaction in Cairo was full-throated: denouncing Israeli actions, the violation of Egyptian sovereignty, and the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty itself.³ The public outrage culminated in September 2011, when protestors outside the Israeli embassy in Cairo breached the compound, ransacked a storage floor, and burned documents before heading for the embassy offices themselves. Had Egyptian

special forces not rescued remaining Israelis just prior to the break-in, the alternative outcome—and any Israeli response—could have had a chilling effect on bilateral relations.

The August 2011 incident only barely avoided becoming an international conflict—at the diplomatic level at the very least—and it solidified fears in Washington and Jerusalem that the Egyptian uprising could mark the eventual collapse of the peace treaty, a pillar of regional stability for more than thirty years. In the two years since, Sinai has indeed become more unstable—as has Egypt, generally—and in many ways the threat of cross-border incidents has grown. At the same time, the peace treaty has held. In terms of security and intelligence cooperation, the bilateral Israeli-Egyptian relationship is strong. The removal of President Hosni

¹ “Timeline / Eight hours of terror in southern Israel,” *Haaretz*, August 18, 2011, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/timeline-eight-hours-of-terror-in-southern-israel-1.379344>>.

² Barak Ravid and Reuters, “Israel, Egypt to open joint probe into events surrounding Eilat terror attacks,” *Haaretz*, August 25, 2011, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-egypt-to-open-joint-probe-into-events-surrounding-eilat-terror-attacks-1.380672>>.

³ Initially, Israeli officials suggested one of the terrorists had killed the Egyptian guards with a suicide bomb; but later Israeli reports hypothesized the Egyptians were caught in cross-fire. The Egyptian authorities blamed Israeli fire, perhaps even airstrikes, for the deaths. Meanwhile, reports varied as to whether Israeli forces entered Sinai in pursuit or merely fired across the border. Israel and Egypt agreed to conduct a joint probe into the incident in late August 2011; however, the investigation was either never conducted or its results never made public. See: Maggie Michael and Ian Deitch, “Egypt to withdraw ambassador to Israel over ambush,” *Associated Press*, August 20, 2011, available at <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/egypt-to-withdraw-ambassador-to-israel-over-ambush-2341011.html>>; Yaakov Katz, “Barak apologizes to Egypt over security officers’ deaths,” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 20, 2011, <<http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Barak-apologizes-to-Egypt-over-security-officers-deaths>>; Avi Issacharoff, “Report: Israel to allow Egypt to deploy troops in Sinai,” *Haaretz*, August 26, 2011, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/report-israel-to-allow-egypt-to-deploy-troops-in-sinai-1.380802>>; Osama Khaled, “UN peacekeeping force: Israeli forces crossed Egyptian border by land,” *Egypt Independent*, August 20, 2011, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/un-peacekeeping-force-israeli-forces-crossed-egyptian-border-land>>; and Barak Ravid and Reuters, “Israel, Egypt to open joint probe into events surrounding Eilat terror attacks,” *Haaretz*, August 25, 2011, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-egypt-to-open-joint-probe-into-events-surrounding-eilat-terror-attacks-1.380672>>.

Mubarak and the subsequent rise of the Muslim Brotherhood—currently on the wane—did not affect cooperation over Sinai security. Even the empowerment of Hamas in Gaza, despite its continued—and at times violent—opposition to Israel’s very existence, has limited the Palestinian group’s actions in ways that support bilateral security cooperation with Egypt (and, quietly through Egyptian channels, with Israel as well). As this paper illustrates, opportunities for Salafi-jihadis to attack Israel from, and to attack Egyptian police and military forces in, Sinai will continue; but the threat can be mitigated through bilateral and even trilateral cooperation between Israel, Egypt, and Hamas. This strengthened cooperation decreases the likelihood of accidental deaths between forces on either side of the Sinai border, and therefore decreases the likelihood that the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty regime will collapse.

A strengthened security relationship between these unlikely partners would be mutually beneficial and allow the sides to combine their assets to counter shared threats while minimizing the risks of international blowback. For example, Israel has the capability to operate in Gaza and even Sinai, but such operations—especially in Egyptian territory—carry high risks. Instead, advanced Israeli intelligence assets can provide early warnings of active terror plots and smuggling operations to Egyptian security authorities, and main operations would be conducted by the Egyptians. Where relevant, the Egyptians may share information with Hamas authorities when threats are active on the Gaza-side of the border. For this to succeed, Israeli decision-makers need to trust that their Egyptian counterparts have the will and ability to counter the threat. The United States can be an effective partner in facilitating this bilateral partnership. Especially during the establishment of such trust, the United States can oversee intelligence sharing between Egypt and Israel. Finally, U.S. aid can provide the proper tools, and the U.S. military can provide the proper training, that the Egyptian military, police,

and border guards need to face these threats. Israeli confidence in Egyptian operations further decreases opportunities in which Israel will risk conducting its own operations in both Sinai and Gaza. During the past year, Egyptian forces have been operating in Sinai, including destroying tunnels on the Gaza border, out of their own national security interests. Such actions now show that Israeli and U.S. policymakers have been misguided over years of urging Egypt to crack down on smuggling tunnels for *Israel’s* benefit.

Of course, there are political costs for each party in such an arrangement. Hamas has historically played a double-game, loosening its grip on Gaza-based Salafi-jihadis when they put enough pressure on Hamas for maintaining calm with the enemy. In addition to the lack of trust Israel has in Hamas’s ability to protect its interests is the limitation placed on Israel by its own longstanding policy to isolate Gaza’s population in an effort to pressure its Hamas rulers. Meanwhile, Egypt needs to balance the requirement of protecting its own national security interests in Sinai with the Egyptian public’s demand that Egypt not support Israeli efforts to isolate Gaza. Each of these problems is addressed below, but many questions still need to be answered by the parties themselves.

The goal of this paper is to promote informed discussion about security cooperation in Sinai, while also suggesting opportunities for strengthening this coordination for the longer term. The first two sections provide background on the Sinai Peninsula before and after the 2011 Egyptian uprising. The third section explores the Egyptian and Israeli national interests regarding Sinai, as well as Hamas’s interests in Gaza and how such interests relate to Sinai. Section four synthesizes overlapping interests and delves into the capabilities of each actor to achieve or maintain them. Discussion in the fifth section focuses on barriers to cooperation, before the sixth section outlines what such a cooperative trilateral relationship would entail.

BACKGROUND

Between 1956 and 1973, Egypt and Israel fought three major wars over the Sinai Peninsula, and rule over the land and its people moved between the two nations in war and peace. The 1978 Camp David Accords, and the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty signed the following year, established the peninsula as a buffer-zone between the two. Instability in Egypt, generally, following the January 25 Revolution also led to an increased instability in Sinai specifically. However, the issues of terrorism, weapons smuggling, and human trafficking began long before the Arab uprisings. From 2004–2006 the Sinai resort towns of Taba, Sharm al-Shaykh, and Dahab were targeted with massive bombings. The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 led to a proliferation of weapons smuggling to the Palestinian enclave; while smuggling lines of materials, food, and fuel were established following the 2006 kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, and especially the 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza—when Israel instituted a blockade to pressure the group. Meanwhile, Israel has been a destination for African migrants seeking economic opportunities and safety from conflicts in

their home countries. Indeed, the fence that Israel built along the Sinai border—which has successfully dissuaded terrorist infiltration—was initially designed to stop illegal crossings by African refugees.

The security problems emanating from Sinai must be viewed, first, from a human angle. While Sinai's harsh and sparsely populated terrain provide a vast hiding space for violent jihadis and criminal elements, the Egyptian state's treatment of the region's Bedouin population breeds a contempt for the state, of which these elements have long taken advantage. According to the official census of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Sinai's population was just under 493,000 in 2006, more than two-thirds of which resided in North Sinai.⁴ At the beginning of 2012, the official estimate of Sinai's population was slightly over 554,000.⁵ Other estimates of Sinai's population range from 360,000 to 600,000 over an area of roughly 23,500 square miles (61,000 square kilometers).⁶ This range is broad, but given Sinai's limited resources either number is a huge increase from the fewer than 50,000

⁴ Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, "Pop. in Governorates (Urban / Rural) According to Final Results of 2006 Pop. Census," Egypt, <<http://www.capmas.gov.eg/pdf/pdf%20population/2-14.pdf>>.

⁵ Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, "Estimated Population & Their Percentage Distribution by Sex & Governorate. In 1/1/2012," Egypt, <<http://www.capmas.gov.eg/pdf/pdf%20population/2-1.pdf>>.

⁶ Nikola Kovac and Trista Guertin, "Armed Groups in the Sinai Peninsula," Civil-Military Fusion Centre, February 2013, available at <<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20130228%20Armed%20Groups%20in%20the%20Sinai%20Peninsula.pdf>>; International Crisis Group, "Egypt's Sinai Question," Middle East/North Africa Report no. 61, January 30, 2007, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/-/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Egypt/61_egypts_sinai_question>; 10; and "Sinai Peninsula," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*, 2013, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/545586/Sinai-Peninsula>>.

inhabitants of Sinai in 1960.⁷ While its Bedouin population is the focus of much consideration—especially in terms of security and smuggling—this sector of Sinai consists of only 80,000 to 200,000 people.⁸ Two of the most important tribes to consider are the Sawarka and the Tarabin, both covering territory in North Sinai.⁹ The former is the most populous tribe, controlling a stretch of land across the Mediterranean coast. The Sawarka reign over al-Arish, Rafah, and Shaykh Zuweid: the major cities in North Sinai. The Tarabin tribe is based south of these population centers, but its brethren make up the Bedouin of Gaza and southern Israel. National borders mean little to nomadic populations; and these cross-border ties are important for smuggling to both of Egypt's eastern neighbors.¹⁰

Bedouin grievances result from perceived unfair economic treatment from state authorities and injustices and rights abuses from state security. Following the return of Sinai to Egyptian hands in 1982, the drive to develop beach resorts in South Sinai led many tribes to be pushed back from their prime territory on the Red Sea coast.¹¹ During the Mubarak era, when the state was still considered strong, some North Sinai Bedouin believed the “government had failed them.”¹² They complained about neglect, police abuses, and feeling as if they were not Egyptian. The Egyptian security apparatus was known to be suspicious of the Bedouin, and few if any were allowed to serve in the police or military.¹³ The situation grew worse following the Sinai resort bombings. Thousands of Bedouin men were arrested and im-

prisoned without evidence or reason. As journalist Mohannad Sabry notes, one aspect of the security apparatus in Sinai during the Mubarak regime was to scare the population with sheer brutality.¹⁴

Sabry, who is writing a book on Sinai, says a second prong of Egypt's security policy in Sinai was to pay off tribal leaders to take care of Egyptian interests. These two aspects are often at odds, and both before and after Egypt's uprising, the state seemed more focused on “controlling” the population than on relieving its desperation through economic growth and development. Sabry points out that, despite being pushed from their land, Bedouin tribes in South Sinai are quieter than those in the north because the tourist infrastructure there provides them with job opportunities. The major resorts are not owned by members of the local population, and most employment in the hotels and restaurants goes to Egyptians from outside the peninsula. However, the Bedouin profit from secondary streams of the tourist market: for example, serving as drivers or running tourist Bedouin camps. Because this income depends on tourism, South Sinai tribes generally avoid terrorism or anything that may scare tourists away. However, during the Mubarak regime the need to create alternative revenue streams for North Sinai's population was generally neglected; post-Mubarak policymakers have paid lip-service to growing Sinai's economy, but have yet to implement any major projects.

The security problems Egypt and Israel are now facing in and from Sinai did not begin in Febru-

⁷ South Sinai Environmental Action Plan, “Working Paper: South Sinai Demographics and Population Projections,” Ministry of State For Environmental Affairs, Support for Environmental Assessment and Management (SEAM) Program, available at <<http://st-katherine.net/downloads/Demographics%20&c%20Population.pdf>>: 2.

⁸ Yehuda Balanga, “Sinai: A Territory Without a Master,” *al-Monitor*, June 23, 2012, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/01/06/trouble-from-the-south.html>>; and “Beduines,” *Sinai*, 2004, <<http://www.allsinai.info/sites/beduines.htm>>.

⁹ “Beduines,” *Sinai*, 2004, <<http://www.allsinai.info/sites/beduines.htm>>.

¹⁰ Joshua Gleis, “Trafficking and the Role of the Sinai Bedouin,” *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 12, The Jamestown Foundation, June 21, 2007, <[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4246#.Ujx5JSeK_pE](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4246#.Ujx5JSeK_pE)>.

¹¹ “Beduines,” *Sinai*, 2004, <<http://www.allsinai.info/sites/beduines.htm>>.

¹² Abigail Hauslohner, “The Trouble with Sinai: Egypt's ‘Mexico’ Problem,” *Time*, March 21, 2010, <<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1973918,00.html>>.

¹³ “EGYPT: Beduines begin to demand equal citizenship rights,” *IRIN*, June 16, 2011, <<http://www.irinnews.org/report/92998/egypt-beduines-begin-to-demand-equal-citizenship-rights>>.

¹⁴ Mohannad Sabry (journalist), in discussion with the author, February 7, 2013.

ary 2011. In addition to the major 2004-2006 resort bombings, Egyptian police forces came under frequent attack from the Bedouin population.¹⁵ From at least 2005, Israeli security authorities have regularly warned citizens about traveling to Sinai because of kidnapping concerns.¹⁶ Eilat, Israel's southern port city and tourist destination, has also previously been the target of rocket attacks from Sinai.¹⁷ In January 2007, a suicide-bomber targeted Eilat for the first time; Israeli authorities presumed the Gazan attacker crossed from Gaza into Sinai and continued on to Eilat from Egyptian territory.¹⁸

Cooperation between Israel and Egypt to address security issues in Sinai is not new either. When Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, its expectations for maintaining Israeli security interests at the border were pinned on Egyptian efforts.¹⁹ To establish this basis for cooperation, Israel and Egypt negotiated a mechanism, which became known as "Agreed Arrangements," that permitted a greater number of Egyptian forces into Sinai than the peace treaty allows.²⁰ The Agreed Arrangements is overseen by the Multinational Force & Observers (MFO), the international organization monitoring both sides' treaty obligations. It is a channel through which each side

can regularly communicate security needs and requests with the other. In addition to this mechanism, about which more is written below, Israel and Egypt worked together following the 2008-2009 Gaza war to attempt to stop Hamas from re-arming.²¹ Israel also offered Egypt recovery and investigation assistance following the Red Sea bombings. Prior to the 2006 Dahab attack, the Israelis reportedly received a non-specific tip about the threat, which suggests some level of intelligence capability in the area.²²

Challenges to such cooperation have also long existed. Egyptian military leaders note that Sinai is not a "normal" border area.²³ The perception that halting smuggling to Gaza affects food imports and other necessities for the population weakens any political will Egyptian authorities may have to interdict weapons and other contraband. Frustrated by an apparent Egyptian refusal to disrupt smuggling through Sinai, the U.S. Congress in fiscal year 2008 made it U.S. law that \$100 million in aid required certification from the secretary of state that Egypt was making a serious effort.²⁴ Even an Egyptian diplomat recommended reading *Wikileaks* to learn that Sinai instability is a longstanding problem in U.S.-Egyptian relations.²⁵

¹⁵ Abigail Hauslohner, "The Trouble with Sinai: Egypt's 'Mexico' Problem," *Time*, March 21, 2010, <<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1973918,00.html>>.

¹⁶ "Travel warning issued for Egypt including Sinai," *Globes*, October 2, 2005, <<http://www.globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?did=1000018027>>.

¹⁷ Anshel Pfeffer and Avi Issacharoff, "PA: Hamas military chief in Rafah ordered rocket attacks on Eilat, Aqaba," *Haaretz*, August 6, 2010, <<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/pa-hamas-military-chief-in-rafah-ordered-rocket-attacks-on-eilat-aqaba-1.306284>>; and "Jordan says rocket hits Red Sea port city of Aqaba," Associated Press, April 22, 2010, available at <<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/04/22/jordan-investigating-possible-rocket-attack/>>.

¹⁸ Rami Amichai, "Suicide bomber kills 3 in Israel's Eilat resort," Reuters, January 29, 2007, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/29/AR2007012900939_2.html>.

¹⁹ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Agreed documents on movement and access from and to Gaza," November 15, 2005, <<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/mfadocuments/pages/agreed%20documents%20on%20movement%20and%20access%20from%20and%20to%20gaza%2015-nov-2005.aspx>>.

²⁰ Brooke Neuman, "A New Reality on the Egypt-Gaza Border (Part I): Contents of the New Israel-Egypt Agreement," PolicyWatch 518, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 19, 2005, <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-new-reality-on-the-egypt-gaza-border-part-i-contents-of-the-new-israel-eg>>.

²¹ Griff Witte, "Israel's Top Leaders Weighing Their Next Steps in Gaza," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2009, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/12/AR2009011203013.html>>.

²² Eli Lake, "Egypt, Israel Cooperating After Blasts," *The New York Sun*, April 25, 2006, <<http://www.nysun.com/foreign/egypt-israel-cooperating-after-blasts/31522/>>.

²³ Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013. Many of the interviews for this paper were conducted in confidentiality. Names, and often locations, of interviewees are withheld to protect this agreement.

²⁴ Jeremy M. Sharp, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations" (Washington: Congressional Research Service, July 19, 2013): 12.

²⁵ Interview with Egyptian diplomat, March 1, 2013.

IMPACT OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS

Each of the above problems, and the challenges in facing them, has been exacerbated by the Arab uprisings. The collapse of the police force in Egypt allowed the Bedouin population of Sinai—as well as Sinai-based Salafi-jihadis—to exact revenge for years of perceived ill-treatment by the police and state. State infrastructure, especially police stations and checkpoints, came under attack during the 18 days of the Egyptian uprising, and continuously since. In addition to security installations, Sinai’s pipeline connecting Egyptian gas to Israel and Jordan was repeatedly attacked, often causing enough damage to halt distribution. The disruptions, and the Israeli partner company’s refusal to pay for undelivered fuel, resulted in the April 2012 termination of the gas deal by the Egyptian side.²⁶ Delivery to Jordan continued, sporadically. In July 2013, the pipeline was again attacked, for the first time in over a year.²⁷

Reportedly, many Salafi-jihadi shaykhs—some of whom escaped from prisons during the uprising against Mubarak, while others were released from Egyptian prisons or returned to the country following

Mubarak’s downfall—have taken refuge in Sinai: an isolated place to train their followers in both religious practice and militancy.²⁸ The anarchy of Egypt proper is also having an effect on relationships in Sinai. In Cairo, the loss of fear of the police during the 2011 revolution transitioned into a loss of respect for Egyptian elites and authority in general. Similarly, the tribal codes that have long governed Sinai’s population are breaking down, as wealth and weapons from smuggling have empowered non-traditional tribal elites. Finally, though Sinai has long been awash in weapons, these stockpiles—and their lethality and capability—have increased exponentially since 2011. Historically, weapons entered the peninsula from Sudan, in the south. Following the revolution in Libya, to the west, the depots of Muammar Qaddafi were emptied: creating entirely new smuggling routes across Egypt to Sinai and Gaza.

The political changes in Egypt were greeted unfavorably in Israel, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even called for the United States to not abandon Mubarak in his final days.²⁹ Many believe that an unstable Sinai is likely to be the next flashpoint

²⁶ Allyn Fisher-Ilan, “Israel says Egypt gas cutoff a business dispute,” Reuters, April 23, 2012, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/23/us-israel-egypt-gas-idUSBRE83M08V20120423>>.

²⁷ Ashraf Sweilam, “Egypt: Militants bomb gas pipeline in Sinai,” Associated Press, July 6, 2013, <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/egypt-militants-bomb-gas-pipeline-sinai>>.

²⁸ Tom Perry and Alastair Macdonald, eds., “INSIGHT-In Sinai, militant Islam flourishes - quietly,” Reuters, April 1, 2012, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/01/egypt-sinai-idUSL6E8EQ66S20120401>>; and interview with a source close to the Egyptian military, April 16, 2013.

²⁹ Barak Ravid, “Israel urges world to curb criticism of Egypt’s Mubarak,” *Haaretz*, January 31, 2011, <<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-urges-world-to-curb-criticism-of-egypt-s-mubarak-1.340238>>.

of cross-border conflict in the region.³⁰ The Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty ended more than 30 years of war between Israel and neighboring states. Salafi-jihadi tactics, however, seem intent on forcing a bilateral crisis.

The August 2011 cross-border attack took place while the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces still ruled Egypt during a period of transition. Salafi-jihadis tried again following the inauguration of President Mohamed Morsi, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. In August 2012, a group attacked an Egyptian military outpost near the border with Israel and Gaza. The terrorists killed 16 Egyptian soldiers, stole two military vehicles, and sped toward the trilateral Kerem Shalom border crossing. The first vehicle exploded as it struck an Israeli lookout tower; the second breached the border, but was unable to find a target before, eventually, being decimated by IDF fire.

With the Israeli border fence complete, operations like the 2011 attack will be harder for Salafi-jihadis to carry out. However, their attempts to create cross-border strife have not been entirely halted. Since the Egyptian revolution, numerous grad rockets have been fired from the southeast corner of the North Sinai governorate toward Eilat.³¹

The 2012 attack that killed 16 Egyptian soldiers turned Egyptian opinion against the Salafi-jihadis and against Hamas in Gaza, which some Egyptians claimed was involved in the operation. As outlined in the below section on barriers to cooperation, there are segments of Egyptian society that see advantages in shifting blame to Hamas. The Egyptian military,

loathe to admit an internal problem with Salafi-jihadis, often points fingers at Gaza for the problem of violent extremists.³² Similarly, anti-Brotherhood media and politicians frequently blame Hamas for instability in Sinai as a way to tie the Egyptian Islamist group—through its Palestinian off-shoot—to the crime.³³ Morsi was able to use the incident to remove an old-guard of military leaders, including the defense minister and chief of staff. However, the attack also disrupted Morsi's stated intention to open up the Rafah border crossing with Gaza to both greater pedestrian traffic and to the transfer of goods for Gaza's population. At the time, Morsi's opponents directly linked the policy of a more open border to the massacre and the possibility of future ones like it.

Security conditions continued to deteriorate during the Morsi presidency. There were regular attacks on police stations and checkpoints, as well as sporadic tourist kidnappings—all of which, fortunately, ended in the individuals' release—and the occasional firing of rockets over the Israeli border. Christian residents of North Sinai were increasingly vulnerable to both intimidation and attack: personally, and on their homes, businesses, and places of worship. One positive point was the minimal cross-border violence during Israel's Operation Pillar of Defense against Hamas and other Gazan militant groups in November 2012. Given the opportunity and motivation to support resistance to Israel, it could have been expected that Salafi-jihadis in Sinai would have significantly targeted Israel during the week-long conflict. However, there was only one incident, on November 16, in which three rockets were fired at Israel from North Sinai.³⁴

³⁰ Tamara Cofman Wittes and Shadi Hamid, "Camp David Peace Treaty Collapse," in "Big Bets and Black Swans: A Presidential Briefing Book," The Brookings Institution, January 17, 2013, <<http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/01/camp-david-peace-treaty-collapse>>.

³¹ Israel Security Agency, "2012 Annual Summary - Terrorism and CT Activity Data and Trends," <<http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/TerrorInfo/2012AnnualSummary-en.pdf>>: 11.

³² Ibrahim Barzak, "Gaza-Linked Egypt Attack Hurts Hamas Border Bid," Associated Press, August 7, 2012, <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/gaza-linked-egypt-attack-hurts-hamas-border-bid>>.

³³ Ibrahim Barzak, "Report Blames Hamas for Egypt Soldier Killings," Associated Press, March 14, 2013, <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/report-blames-hamas-egypt-soldier-killings>>.

³⁴ "Egypt security: 3 rockets fired from Sinai toward Israel," Ma'an News Agency, November 18, 2012, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=538433>>.

In mid-May 2013, seven Egyptian soldiers and policemen were kidnapped while traveling outside al-Arish.³⁵ Despite the frequent killing of individual members of the security forces in the years following the 2011 uprising, this incident galvanized the Egyptian public in support of “doing something” to counter Sinai’s insecurity in a way that had not been seen since the August 2012 barracks attack. This was especially in response to a YouTube video posted of the hostages bound and blindfolded, begging for help.³⁶

Reports on Egypt’s response to this incident vary and are difficult to take at face value. In the lead up to the June 30 protests against Morsi, and in the media campaign following his ouster, there has been a concerted effort by opponents of Morsi and supporters of the military to paint Morsi as weak on Salafi-jihadi terrorism and indifferent to the threat Egypt faces in Sinai. However, reports indicate that, while speaking harshly against the kidnapers publicly, Morsi worked with other Islamist groups to negotiate the release of the kidnapped.³⁷ At the same time, the military mobilized for a major campaign to free the soldiers and policemen and counter the perpetrators with force.³⁸ Before a military operation could commence, the captives were freed and flown to Cairo, with little public explanation of their release. However, it appeared that a com-

bination of negotiations with local Bedouin leaders plus the threat of force convinced the kidnapers to concede. The Egyptian government denied offering concessions, while other reports claimed a promise to review the criminal sentences and prison conditions of certain individuals, whose family members were behind the kidnapping in order to bring attention to the case.³⁹

Sinai security deteriorated further with the military’s removal of President Morsi on July 3, 2013. In preparation for the June 30 protests, and out of concern that violent Islamists in both Sinai and Gaza may attempt to intervene, Egypt closed the Rafah border crossing and cut access across the Suez Canal from Sinai. The Egyptian army also effectively sealed the tunnels underneath the Gaza border: leaving an estimated fewer than ten operational.⁴⁰

Morsi’s removal coincided with a clear uptick in violence and destruction in Sinai. Despite a lack of direct evidence, the Egyptian military and its supporters point to statements made by Muslim Brotherhood leaders to insist that Morsi’s movement has been behind this unrest.⁴¹ It is certainly the case, however, that Salafi-jihadi groups in Sinai took advantage of the situation, resulting in an increase in anti-state violence in Sinai. June 2013 was a relatively quiet month as far as attacks against police

³⁵ “Sinai kidnapping: Egyptian soldiers and police seized,” BBC, May 16, 2013, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22552877>>.

³⁶ “Sinai hostages ‘can no longer stand torture’ call on Morsi for help,” *Al Arabiya* with Agence France-Presse, May 19, 2013, <<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/05/19/egypt.html>>.

³⁷ Ahmed Aboul Enein, “Morsi: Sinai kidnapers are criminals, not jihadists,” *Daily News Egypt*, May 20, 2013, <<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/05/20/morsi-sinai-kidnappers-are-criminals-not-jihadists/>>; and Nouran El-Beairy, “Presidential advisor in Sinai to negotiate soldiers’ release,” *Daily News Egypt*, May 18, 2013, <<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/05/18/presidential-advisor-in-sinai-to-negotiate-soldiers-release/>>.

³⁸ “Egypt sends military reinforcements to Sinai,” *Abram Online*, May 20, 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/71864.aspx>>.

³⁹ Heba Helmy, “Thursday’s papers: Little known about Sinai rescue operation,” *Egypt Independent*, May 23, 2013, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/thursday-s-papers-little-known-about-sinai-rescue-operation>>; and Ahmed Hafez, “Kidnapped Egypt soldiers’ release still ‘a mystery’: Sinai tribal leader,” *Abram Online*, May 26, 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/72387.aspx>>.

⁴⁰ “Egyptian interior ministry to close routes from Sinai to mainland for 30 June,” *Abram Online*, June 18, 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/74314.aspx>>; and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs occupied Palestinian territory, “Protection of Civilians Weekly Report 2-8 July 2013,” <http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_protection_of_civilians_weekly_report_2013_07_12_english.pdf>: 4-5.

⁴¹ Mounir Adib, “Mapping jihadi groups in Sinai,” *Egypt Independent*, August 10, 2013, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/mapping-jihadi-groups-sinai>>.

installations and security personnel.⁴² By comparison, 44 people were killed in Sinai in the month following Morsi's removal: 33 policemen and soldiers and 11 civilians.⁴³ In just the week after the August 14 dispersal of pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo, 50 people had been killed and 93 wounded in Sinai—90 percent of them security personnel.⁴⁴

The Egyptian military did step up counter-terror activity in Sinai following the coup. On August 23, a spokesman announced that recent operations had resulted in the death of 78 militants and the arrest of 203 others.⁴⁵ It was unclear, however, what effect these operations were having on stomping out the threat, as this announcement came just four days after the daytime execution-style killing of 25 policemen traveling by bus near Rafah.⁴⁶

As summer turned to fall, Egyptian military operations continued, providing for the most sustained security operation in Sinai since the 2011 uprising and the most intense fighting in Sinai since the

1973 war. The Egyptian armed forces regularly announced numbers of suspects arrested, militants killed, and weapons captured. As the operation continued, however, so did the near daily killing of policemen and border guards by sniper-fire, rocket attacks, and roadside bombs. On September 11, near simultaneous suicide bombings targeting the military intelligence headquarters and an army checkpoint in Rafah killed at least six Egyptian soldiers.⁴⁷ Credit for the attack was claimed by the previously unknown Jund al-Islam.⁴⁸

Egyptian officials repeated that joint military and police operations would continue in Sinai until the region is secure and free of "terrorists," and one Israeli official called the effort Egypt's most serious attempt to crackdown on the Salafi-jihadi threat in Sinai.⁴⁹ As of October 2013, there was no sign that either the Egyptian forces or Sinai's militants were letting up, nor was there indication of a long-term plan to sustain security gains once military operations cease.

⁴² In June 2013, only two Egyptian policemen were killed in Sinai, while two others were kidnapped. Additionally, at the end of June a Palestinian man in Sinai was shot dead, and his wife was wounded. See: Al-Sayed Gamal El-Din, "Police officer killed in militant attack in Sinai," *Abram Online*, June 29, 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/75259.aspx>>; and "Palestinian shot dead in Sinai, wife critically injured," Ma'an News Agency, June 30, 2013, <<http://www.maannews.net/ENG/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=609330>>.

⁴³ "One Soldier Killed in al-Arish in an Attack and 44 Killed in Sinai since the Isolation of Morsi" (Mutil jundi fi al-Arish bihujum wa 44 qatilan fi Sinai mandhu 'azil Morsi), *al-Quds al-Arabi*, August 5, 2013, <<http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=70829>>.

⁴⁴ "143 Killed and Wounded in Sinai following the Break-Up of Sit-Ins of Rabaa and Nahda in Cairo" (143 qateel wa jareeh fi Sinai 'aqib fad i'tisam rabi'a wa al-nahda bi Cairo), *Akhhbar al-Yom*, August 21, 2013, <bit.ly/19q9u16>.

⁴⁵ Official Facebook page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, Facebook post, August 23, 2013, <<https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/359774184153570>>.

⁴⁶ "Militants kill 25 Egyptian policemen in Sinai," *Abram Online*, August 20, 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/79393.aspx>>.

⁴⁷ "Six soldiers dead in twin bomb attack on Egyptian military in Sinai," *Abram Online*, September 11, 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/81321.aspx>>.

⁴⁸ David Barnett, "Jund al Islam claims credit for Sinai suicide car bomb attacks," *The Long War Journal*, September 12, 2013, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/09/jund_al_islam_claims.php>.

⁴⁹ "Army to continue operations till Sinai is terrorist-free": Spokesman," *Abram Online*, September 15, 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/81641.aspx>>; and Gili Cohen, "Egypt fighting first-ever serious battle against Sinai terror, says Israeli official," *Haaretz*, September 8, 2013, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.545850>>.

INTERESTS

As Egyptian territory bordering Israel and the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula is a region of great import to the Egyptian and Israeli governments as well as to Hamas, which rules Gaza. Although the relationships between these three actors are complicated, to say the least, each has a series of interests to be maintained in Sinai. Instead of analyzing Sinai from the perspective of Egyptian stability or Israeli security, it is necessary to evaluate what the peninsula means to each party, where their interests intersect, and how that intersection can lead to both a shared understanding of the problems and cooperative solutions.

EGYPTIAN INTERESTS

Egypt's main interest is the ability to project sovereignty across its entire territory, especially its border regions. Maintaining full control of its vast borders is not a new problem for the Egyptian state, but an increased flow of people and arms from Sudan and Libya further complicates the effort. Those borders are far from Sinai, but are important to note for three reasons. First, the Sinai border with Gaza/Israel is not Egypt's only area of concern. Second, the inability of Egypt to maintain full control of its other borders shows that the limitations of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty are not the only reason for Egypt's inability to control its border territories. Third, the trafficking of humans, weapons, and other goods from Sudan and Libya is very much

connected to the Sinai issue because much of the supply-line flows to the peninsula on its way to Gaza (in the case of arms and goods) or Israel (the hoped-for destination of migrants).

Although Egypt may never have had full control of Sinai, prior to the revolution the state managed to maintain a general level of security through a combination of working with tribal leaders and, when that did not work, pure brute force exercised by the ministry of interior. Since the revolution, that general fear of the police is gone. Indeed, nationwide, Egypt is still struggling to restore law and order. Regaining control of Sinai, at least to the level that it existed prior to the revolution, is the biggest Egyptian interest regarding the peninsula.

During his year as president, Mohamed Morsi's priority was consolidating his control of the government and the Egyptian state. That goal took precedence over any long-term desire the Muslim Brotherhood may have in Israel's destruction or deep-seated anti-Semitism on the part of Morsi and the organization. As such, despite a halt in bilateral relations at the political level, under Morsi the Egyptian government—whether in its own decision-making or at the direction of the security services—took care to avoid statements, policies, and actions that could cause a diplomatic conflict with its neighbor to the east. This was reflected by the disappointment the Hamas leadership—and

Palestinians generally—felt when Morsi maintained most of the same policies toward Gaza as had Mubarak. It is debatable whether such a cooperative relationship with Israel could have been sustained under long-term Muslim Brotherhood governance, but the consideration is now moot.

Morsi and the Brotherhood were never successful in gaining control over state institutions, which—along with throngs of Egyptian people—rebelled against Morsi’s rule in late June and early July 2013. As noted above, Morsi’s removal and the declaration of an interim government by the military on July 3, 2013, coincided with an increase in security incidents in Sinai. For the interim government, and the Egyptian military that it *de facto* serves, regaining control and maintaining security continues to be a priority. However, Morsi supporters in some instances responded to the coup by clashing with anti-Morsi protestors and attacking security forces, police stations, and churches in Cairo, Alexandria, and other cities throughout Egypt. These incidents are clearly politically motivated. They are sometimes unprovoked, especially attacks on churches or police stations in Upper Egypt. In many instances, the police forces’ heavy-handed attempts to deal with pro-Morsi protests provoke heavy-handed responses.

Although Sinai is still a priority, it is unclear if focus will turn from Sinai to, literally, putting out fires in other parts of the country.⁵⁰ As one example, it was reported that Egypt withdrew special forces commandos from Sinai to protect the Suez Canal Zone during the state’s confrontation with Cairo sit-ins.⁵¹ It cannot be predicted how long Egypt’s current political uncertainty will continue; but until it settles, the Egyptian government, military, and ministry of

interior will constantly need to make similar assessments of deployment and policy priorities.

Egypt also desires to minimize police and armed forces casualties in the Sinai Peninsula. Police stations and checkpoints have come under frequent attack since the beginning of 2011, and the Egyptian state maintains an interest in their security and well-being. Incidents such as the 2012 barracks massacre and the May 2013 kidnapping of police officers and soldiers in Sinai created such backlashes against the perceived perpetrators because the safety of soldiers is held higher for Egyptians generally, and even the Bedouin population—which despises the police—views the military favorably.

Related to the safety of its police and armed forces, Egypt has an interest in countering anti-Egyptian terrorism and threats to its tourist economy. Mass-casualty events, like those of 2004–2006, have yet to be replicated post-January 25. Nor has there been a return to the sporadic targeting of tourists and foreigners that took place during the 1990s. Indeed, tourism to Egypt has receded because of the general political instability and violence, not because of any threat to tourists.⁵² In 2005, days after a bombing in Sharm al-Shaykh, luxury hotels in Dahab—60 miles up the coast—faced mass-cancellations of European tourists, a normal immediate reaction to terrorism. Sustained attacks could lead to a permanent reduction in the industry as tourists migrate to other, more stable, countries.

Already, the trend of Bedouin kidnapping tourists to get the state’s attention when demands are otherwise neglected is heading in a negative direction. Despite no one being killed to date—indeed, for the most part, captives have been treated quite

⁵⁰ Zack Gold, “Why Israel Will Miss Morsi,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 20, 2013, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139835/zack-gold/why-israel-will-miss-morsi?page=show>>.

⁵¹ Alex Fishman, “Eventually It Will Reach Us,” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, August 20, 2013: 10 (as translated by *Israel News Today*, Jerusalem, August 20, 2013).

⁵² Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, “Number Of Tourists [sic] Nights and No. Of Tourists 2013,” Egypt, <http://www.capmas.gov.eg/pdf/Toru_2012_e.pdf>.

well—the most recent incident, an Israeli man and European woman captured in March 2013, lasted several days instead of the mere hours previous captives had been held. Those grabbing foreigners do not seem intent on causing harm, but there is always a possibility that something could go wrong. Further, it may only be a matter of time before kidnapping tourists is not just a way for Bedouin to get attention but also for Salafi-jihadis to make a statement.

In addition to the threat of terrorism in Sinai is the possibility that the peninsula's isolation from security services makes it a prime location from which to plan terrorist attacks in Cairo or elsewhere in Egypt's "mainland." Indeed, in the build-up to one security operation in Sinai, Salafi-jihadis threatened to take the fight to Egypt's population centers if their havens in Sinai came under attack.⁵³ Following the August breakup of pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo, al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya—a Sinai-based group, reportedly led by Mohamed al-Zawahiri, the brother of al-Qa'ida's leader—released a statement telling its followers that the Egyptian army "must be fought until they stop their harm..."⁵⁴ Such threats materialized on September 5, 2013, when the Sinai-based Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis proved its ability to operate outside of Sinai with a suicide bombing assassination attempt on Egypt's interior minister, Mohamed Ibrahim, near his Cairo home.⁵⁵

ISRAELI INTERESTS

Though Israel is keen to ensure Sinai does not serve as a threat to its territory, its political and security leaders generally voice approval of Egyptian efforts to maintain control. In part, this is because Egyptian-Israeli security and intelligence cooperation is

currently stronger than it has ever been. To a greater extent, despite concern about Sinai instability, at a strategic level Israel is significantly more concerned about the maintenance of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. A trickling of rockets is a threat, but returning to a state of war with Egypt (regardless of whether that would ever lead to an actual state-on-state armed conflict) would completely change Israel's strategic calculus and military posture. For this reason, Israeli leaders praise Egyptian leaders when they act appropriately, remain uncharacteristically quiet when Egyptians lambast Israel or Israeli policies, and generally leave arm-twisting and ex-coriating to the United States and the international community.

Maintaining relations with Egypt is key; however, any Israeli government would only have so much flexibility while its population is under attack. To date, rocket attacks against Eilat have caused minimal damage and no casualties. However, a steady flow of projectiles, or a direct hit on a school or hotel, would be a challenge for Israeli policy. In April 2013, Israel moved a battery of its Iron Dome anti-rocket system to Eilat, following intelligence of an impending attack. When the rockets were fired, however, the system did not engage. One possible reason that Iron Dome missiles were not fired is that IDF operators were concerned the anti-rocket system may accidentally target an incoming passenger airplane full of tourists. Another possibility, however, is that given Eilat's location tucked between Jordan and Egypt, the interception of incoming fire may have taken place over non-Israeli territory.

Had the rockets caused more than minor damage in a residential neighborhood, the government could have faced criticism for holding its fire out of respect

⁵³ Elad Benari, "Salafi Terror Group Threatens to Attack in the Heart of Cairo," *Arutz Sheva*, August 16, 2012, <<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/158959>>.

⁵⁴ David Barnett, "Sinai jihadists threaten attacks as Egyptian army claims successes," *The Long War Journal*, August 23, 2013, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/sinai_jihadists_thre.php>.

⁵⁵ Yasmine Saleh, "Sinai Islamists claim responsibility for attack on Egypt minister," Reuters, September 8, 2013, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/08/us-egypt-attack-interior-idUSBRE9870BX20130908>>.

for international boundaries.⁵⁶ Similarly, any infiltration of Israel by terrorists from Sinai could lead to a similar incident of a hot pursuit back across the international border, as happened in August 2011. In order to avoid necessary tactical responses that would violate Egyptian sovereignty, it is in Israel's great interest to deter Gaza-based terrorists or Salafi-jihadis, what Israel refers to as "Global jihad," from either using Sinai as a base for training or as a launch-point for cross-border attacks.

In addition to threats emanating from Sinai itself, Israel maintains a strong interest in halting the flow of weapons through Sinai to the Gaza Strip. This, again, is not a new, post-Egyptian uprising threat. Smuggling tunnels under the Sinai-Gaza border first became a major problem in 2005, when Israeli forces withdrew from the Philadelphi Route along the border, although smuggling expanded significantly following the 2007 takeover of Gaza by Hamas and the subsequent Israeli policy of limiting imports and exports. Indeed, the 2008-2009 Gaza war was fought—and the subsequent re-arming of Hamas and other Palestinian groups was achieved—with arms and materials smuggled into Gaza. However, the quantity, lethality, and capabilities of smuggled weapons increased following the Arab uprisings: whether this was in the importation of Fajr-5 rockets from Iran or man-portable air-defense systems and other anti-aircraft systems from Libya.⁵⁷

Finally, Israeli prime minister Netanyahu and his past and current governments have placed significant focus on halting the flow of illegal immigrants from Africa. By large measure, Israel has succeeded

in this task through the construction of a high-tech fence running almost the entire length of the Egyptian-Israeli border. According to government figures, in May 2012 over two thousand African migrants illegally entered Israel; a year later, the monthly total was two.⁵⁸

HAMAS'S INTERESTS

Although considered a terrorist organization by Israel and the West, it is remarkable to note the transition of Hamas's interests over time as the group has transitioned from a non-state actor to what may be called a quasi-state actor. One of the challenges in countering a terrorist group is that, as opposed to a state-based adversary, terrorist groups rarely have significant territory to target. This has not been the case for Hamas since 2007, when it tossed the Palestinian Authority—controlled by its rival, Fatah—out of Gaza in a bloody internecine dispute.

Since 2007, Hamas has worked to consolidate and maintain control over the Gaza Strip, its institutions, and its population. More than destroying Israel, in the near term, Hamas's key interest is maintaining unrivaled governing authority over Gaza. Because of Gaza's position and location, maintaining this control is directly related to the Sinai Peninsula.

There are three significant challenges to Hamas's unrivaled hold on Gaza. The first is an internal Gaza threat: rival groups, especially Salafi-jihadis, challenging Hamas's leadership—both of Gaza and of the "resistance" against Israel. These Salafi-jihadi groups

⁵⁶ Ron Friedman and Associated Press, "Two Grad rockets fired at Eilat," *The Times of Israel*, April 17, 2013, <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/two-explosions-rock-eilat/>>.

⁵⁷ Leila Fadel, "Smuggled Libyan weapons flood into Egypt," *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/smuggled-libyan-weapons-flood-into-egypt/2011/10/12/gIQA2YQuff_story.html>; and Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, "Hamas boosting anti-aircraft arsenal with looted Libyan missiles," *Haaretz*, October 27, 2011, <<http://www.haaretz.com/misc/article-print-page/hamas-boosting-anti-aircraft-arsenal-with-looted-libyan-missiles-1.392186>>.

⁵⁸ Prime Minister's Office, "PM Netanyahu Comments on Data that Indicates a Continued Decline in the Number of Infiltrators Entering Israel," Israel, June 2, 2013, <<http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Spokesman/Pages/spokemistanenim020613.aspx>>.

have long come under pressure from Hamas, but arrests continue to this day.⁵⁹ Squeezed in Gaza, many Palestinian Salafi-jihadi groups have spread their operations into Sinai, where they have more freedom of operation and the ability to connect with Bedouin tribes and Egyptian and foreign Salafi-jihadis, as well as access to training and weapons outside Gaza. Inside and outside Gaza, they continue to assault Hamas's legitimacy: as an Islamist movement but especially as the forefront of the jihad against Israel.⁶⁰

The second challenge to unrivaled rule over Gaza is reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, which will inevitably bring the Palestinian Authority back into the enclave. Palestinian reconciliation is beyond the scope of this paper; although it should be noted that despite many meetings, more than a few agreements, and regular statements of "any day now," no recognizable progress has been made in returning the Palestinian territories to the rule of a single authority such that existed until 2007. During the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas may have seen political Islam in ascent and believed its movement could similarly gain legitimate control of Palestinian governance. Certainly, such a plan has been set back by the Brotherhood's removal from power next door.

The final challenge to Hamas's control of Gaza is Israel. Ever since the movement took over the strip, Israeli policy has been to shake it from power. One of the main purposes of the Israeli blockade was to pressure the Palestinian population of Gaza to reject Hamas rule. This policy has not worked. Despite the hardships, most Palestinians blamed Israel,

not Hamas, for the outcome. Indeed, the blockade has lessened since 2007. However, Israel could also collapse the Hamas government through armed engagement: either by a full-scale operation to actually overthrow Hamas and reoccupy Gaza, or—less likely to succeed—by causing such destruction and disappointment that the population revolts.

Palestinian Salafi-jihadis in Gaza and Sinai have the ability to tempt Israel into such an operation. Prior to November 2012, Hamas had a major interest in keeping the border with Israel generally calm. A quiet border for Israel meant that, grudgingly, Israeli leaders would not challenge Hamas's authority over Gaza. Seeing *de facto* quiet-for-quiet cooperation between Hamas and the Israeli enemy, Salafi-jihadi groups picked up the mantle of jihad and fired their own rockets—most smuggled in from Sinai, but others homemade—across the border. By having its "resistance" credibility attacked, Hamas found itself in a difficult place balancing challenges to its interests: if Hamas held fire—and exerted effort to halt the fire of other Palestinian groups—its unrivaled rule would be challenged from inside; but if it joined the fray, it risked its rule being challenged from outside.

Ultimately, Hamas settled on accepting the challenge from Israel—but over a different interest than its unrivaled control of Gaza. While it has been shown that Hamas has an interest in maintaining relative quiet between Israel and Gaza-based Palestinian militants, the group also has an interest in ensuring it has the greatest possible weapons capabilities in case that quiet is broken. As such, despite conflict being against its main interest, Hamas has

⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Gaza," Middle East Report no. 104, March 29, 2011, <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/104-radical-islam-in-gaza.aspx>>; "Hamas arrests Salafi militants in Gaza," *al-Akhbar*, September 5, 2012, <<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/hamas-arrests-salafi-militants-gaza>>; "Gaza Salafist group accuses Hamas of torturing members," Agence France-Presse, October 1, 2012, available at <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Oct-01/189752-gaza-salafist-group-accuses-hamas-of-torturing-members.ashx>>; and "Hamas arrests Salafists in Gaza," Agence France-Presse, May 2, 2013, available at <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/May-02/215795-hamas-arrests-6-hard-line-islamists-in-gaza.ashx>>.

⁶⁰ David Barnett, "Salafi jihadists warn of impending campaign of arrests by Hamas," *The Long War Journal*, March 30, 2013, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/03/salafi_jihadists_warn_of_impen.php>.

continued to import weapons and receive trainers through the tunnels under the Gaza border with Sinai. Reportedly, Ahmed Jabari, the head of Hamas's military wing, was in charge of both importing Iranian-made long-range Fajr-5 rockets and of maintaining the quiet with Israel.⁶¹ His success in the former, and failure in the latter, led to Israel targeting Jabari for assassination on November 14, 2012, which set off the week-long Operation Pillar of Defense.

A final Hamas interest is also related to its main interest of control. Without revenues, Hamas would not be able to maintain authority over Gaza. The development of a tunnel economy between Gaza

and Sinai provides the Hamas government with a taxable industry. It is estimated that 30 percent of Gaza's imports come through the tunnels.⁶² The Hamas government oversees this operation—approving imported goods and people—and collects a set tax on it all, which accounts for about 10 percent of its governing budget.⁶³ This creates a challenge for ending the tunnel trade (discussed below), despite repeated claims from Hamas leaders that tunnel operations would cease if the border with Egypt is opened fully.⁶⁴ Per prior agreements, any revenues from the Rafah crossing would go to the Palestinian Authority, which has a strong interest in depleting the coffers of Hamas.

⁶¹ Amos Harel et al., "Israel launches Operation Pillar of Defense || Hamas military chief Ahmed Jabari killed by Israeli strike," *Haaretz*, November 14, 2012, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/hamas-military-chief-ahmed-jabari-killed-by-israeli-strike.premium-1.477819>>; and Ethan Bronner, "With Longer Reach, Rockets Bolster Hamas Arsenal," *The New York Times*, November 17, 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/18/world/middleeast/arms-with-long-reach-bolster-hamas.html>>.

⁶² Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Egypt floods Gaza tunnels to cut Palestinian lifeline," Reuters, February 13, 2013, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/13/us-palestinians-egypt-tunnels-idUSBRE91C0RF20130213>>.

⁶³ Rory McCarthy, "Hamas imposes new Gaza taxes to pay for burgeoning bureaucracy," *The Guardian*, April 8, 2010, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/apr/08/hamas-taxes-gaza>>; David Lev, "IDF: Hamas Makes a Million a Day in 'Taxes' on Smuggled Goods," *Arutz Sheva*, February 11, 2013, <<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/165125>>; and William Booth, "Hamas in Gaza is running out of friends," *The Washington Post*, August 24, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/hamas-in-gaza-is-running-out-of-friends/2013/08/24/7dd4560e-0b04-11e3-89fe-abb4a5067014_story_1.html>.

⁶⁴ "Official: Hamas willing to close down tunnels," Ma'an News Agency, May 23, 2013, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=597804>>.

AN INTERSECTION OF INTERESTS AND CAPABILITIES

The Sinai Peninsula generally, and the tri-border area specifically, is a complicated border region. There is a legitimate state-to-state relationship between Israel and Egypt—albeit, a cold peace with frozen political ties. Gaza, a quasi-state itself, is ruled by a non-state armed group that refuses to recognize Israel; while Israel, too, refuses to legitimate Hamas’s rule. The Egyptian military and interim government’s assault on the Muslim Brotherhood, which shares historical roots with Hamas, has left Egypt-Gaza ties strained as well.

Even so, the above analysis of interests shows two clear overlaps between the Egyptian government, the Israeli government, and Hamas. First, all three parties want to counter the rise of Salafi-jihadis in Sinai. For the Egyptian government, Sinai-based Salafi-jihadis threaten police, state infrastructure, and tourism, while Sinai’s Bedouin elite suffer from jihadi effects on tribal relations. From Hamas’s perspective, Sinai gives a lifeline to the Salafi-jihadis that threaten its rule in Gaza. The inter-connected relationship between Salafi-jihadis in Gaza and Sinai means that these groups must be countered on both sides of the border. Israel is concerned that Salafi-jihadis acting freely in Sinai will train for and carry-out attacks against it—either from Sinai itself or by returning to Gaza to do so.

Second, Egypt, Hamas, and Israel each have a clear interest in avoiding border tensions that could escalate to full conflicts, which is why each has a stake in halting cross-border incidents. While Hamas must continue its verbal—and sporadically physical—assault on Israel to maintain its “resistance” credibility, a full-scale armed conflict with Israel, especially an extended one, would have the possibility of shaking Hamas’s control of Gaza. Meanwhile, Egyptian security and political leaders quickly responded to, and tried to put out, the November 2012 Israel-Gaza conflagration. Despite sympathies for the Palestinian side, Egyptian material support for Hamas would have gone against its international obligations toward Israel, as well as threatened relations with the United States and the West. However, an extended conflict could have given time for popular Egyptian mobilization demanding the government break ties with Israel over the conflict.

As mentioned above, Israel wants to avoid creating tensions with Egypt that could occur when responding to cross-border terrorism. Indeed, Egyptian military leaders see the dreaded scenario of a border conflict with Israel as absolutely out of the question—as long as the Israelis stay on their side of the border.⁶⁵ Israeli national security decision-making takes possible Egyptian responses into account not just on the Sinai border but regarding Gaza as

⁶⁵ Interview with third U.S. official, February 4, 2013.

well. Reportedly, one of the factors against initiating a ground-invasion of Gaza in 2012 was concern of the Egyptian response.⁶⁶ However, crossing the border will be increasingly tempting for Israeli forces if provocations continue from Sinai.

Egypt, Hamas, and Israel each have capabilities that can help counter the threats to their shared interests from Salafi-jihadis and maintain relative quiet in the border region. Especially for Israel, however, the ability to unilaterally maintain one interest (preempting Salafi-jihadi attacks) may negatively affect the other (avoiding border tensions). After analyzing individual capabilities, the following sections will attempt to outline challenges and opportunities for these wary neighbors to work together.

ISRAELI CAPABILITIES

Israeli capabilities in Gaza are not the focus of this paper, but are relevant because the Salafi-jihadi groups operating in Sinai are connected to those in the Palestinian enclave. The organizations firing rockets from Gaza are often the same as—or, at least, linked to—those firing from Sinai. As such, Israel’s intelligence gathering in Gaza allows it to disrupt plots in Sinai. Similarly, it may have the opportunity to target terrorists that frequently operate from Sinai while they are present in Gaza, such as Haitham al-Meshal.⁶⁷ Though military operations and assassinations in Gaza are by definition provocative, they are certainly less so than if Israel attempted to hit these operatives while in Egypt.

Israel is significantly more wary of operating inside Egypt—a country with which it maintains a peace treaty. Unlike their frequent use in Gaza, Israel does not send unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, commonly known as drones) over Sinai.⁶⁸ However, this does not leave Israel blind. Surveillance devices can, from the Israeli side of the border, see far into Sinai. Israeli drones can observe 40km into the peninsula without violating Egyptian airspace.⁶⁹ In addition to traditional drones, Israel anchors balloon-mounted cameras above its border.⁷⁰ Further, Israel’s unique satellite patterns also give the country a near-constant view of Egypt. Unlike most nations, which launch their satellites around Earth’s poles, Israeli satellites orbit west-to-east. Initially done out of necessity—given limited airspace and hostile neighbors, Israeli satellites had to be launched over the Mediterranean Sea—the path of its six or so satellites conveniently gives Israel a more regular view of a belt of countries across South Asia and North Africa.⁷¹ Israel’s intelligence capabilities are not limited to sight and also include electronic surveillance.⁷²

While Israeli officials will not talk about human intelligence operations in Sinai, a report in *The Jerusalem Post* noted in summer 2012 the intelligence turf-war over the territory.⁷³ Israel’s domestic intelligence service, Shin Bet, argued that the Salafi-jihadi threat in Sinai was an extension of the threat from Gaza—which it monitors; military intelligence claimed jurisdiction because of the Sinai threat to its southern command; and

⁶⁶ “Ground invasion?,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 18, 2012, <<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Ground-invasion>>.

⁶⁷ “Israeli air strike kills Palestinian in Gaza,” *al-Jazeera*, April 30, 2013, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/20134306282810206.html>>.

⁶⁸ Meeting with Israeli UAV pilot, Palmachim Air Force Base, Israel, January 29, 2013.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Barak Ravid, “Shin Bet forms new unit to thwart attacks on Israel by Sinai jihadists,” *Haaretz*, August 20, 2013, <<http://www.haaretz.com/mobile/premium-1.542417>>.

⁷¹ Meeting with Israeli official, Tel Aviv, Israel, January 23, 2013; and Anshel Pfeffer, “Israel Air Force reveals its satellite secrets,” *Haaretz*, April 18, 2011, <<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-air-force-reveals-its-satellite-secrets-1.356517>>.

⁷² Barak Ravid, “Shin Bet forms new unit to thwart attacks on Israel by Sinai jihadists,” *Haaretz*, August 20, 2013, <<http://www.haaretz.com/mobile/premium-1.542417>>.

⁷³ Yaakov Katz, “Israel to revamp intel-gathering process in Sinai,” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 8, 2012, <<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Israel-to-revamp-intel-gathering-process-in-Sinai>>.

Mossad, the foreign intelligence agency, believed that it should be responsible for intelligence gathering in Egypt—a foreign nation not at war with Israel. This matter remained unsettled into 2013; however, reportedly an arrangement had been agreed between Shin Bet and military intelligence by August 2013.⁷⁴ Accordingly, Israel's military intelligence is responsible for intelligence collection; whereas, Shin Bet is responsible for disrupting attacks against Israel from Sinai—much as it does in the Palestinian territories.

According to Egyptian reports, there have been recent arrests of Israeli spy rings in Sinai.⁷⁵ Further, Egyptian officials blamed Israel for the explosive demise of a Salafi-jihadi operative responsible for firing rockets toward Eilat.⁷⁶ More concrete, a Palestinian man disappeared from Sinai in June and showed up in Israeli custody a week later. A gag-order was placed on the circumstances of his arrest; but his lawyer claimed a resident of Sinai, working with Israel, arranged for his abduction.⁷⁷ Given the connection between Salafi-jihadi operations in Gaza and Sinai—or, perhaps, its intelligence capabilities in Sinai itself—Israel does appear to have a handle on terrorist threats emanating from the peninsula. Following the August 2012 attack, the director of the Egyptian general intelligence service admitted to receiving advanced warning from his Israeli counterparts.⁷⁸ Indeed, from their reaction, it seemed as if the Israelis were lying in wait for the strike.⁷⁹

As the situation in Sinai worsened in the summer of 2013, Israeli leaders weighed the sensitivity of operating in Sinai against the necessity of protecting their country. In August, an Israeli Iron Dome battery intercepted an incoming rocket over Eilat for the first time.⁸⁰ However, Israeli defense policy in the south is realistically limited to homeland defense, not pre-emptive or defensive invasion.

While an overt invasion may be off the table, the possibility exists that Israel will conduct one-off kinetic operations against targets in Sinai. Israel has a history of covert military strikes, often deniable, especially when it has intelligence about game-changing weapons. The difference in the case of Sinai is the relationship with Egypt. Unlike Iraq, Sudan, or Syria, Israel maintains peaceful relations with Egypt, respects its sovereignty, and if anything wants that sovereignty over Sinai to be strengthened.

Israeli leaders have been wary of shaking relations with Egypt since the 2011 uprising, which is why it is very unlikely Israel would attack across the border on an intelligence lead without Egyptian permission. This is what makes an August 9, 2013, incident so interesting. That day, a rocket squad from Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis was preparing to shoot rockets at Israel from North Sinai when its platform exploded, killing four. Witnesses reported seeing an Israeli drone in the area, and an Egyptian Apache helicopter was at the scene shortly after the

⁷⁴ Meeting with Israeli official, Jerusalem, Israel, January 27, 2013; and Barak Ravid, "Shin Bet forms new unit to thwart attacks on Israel by Sinai jihadists," *Haaretz*, August 20, 2013, <<http://www.haaretz.com/mobile/premium-1.542417>>.

⁷⁵ "State paper: Israel spy ring broken in North Sinai," *Egypt Independent*, April 21, 2013, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/state-paper-israel-spy-ring-broken-north-sinai>>.

⁷⁶ "Egyptian security: Militant killed in Sinai explosion," Ma'an News Agency, August 27, 2012, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=514619>>.

⁷⁷ Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Gazan in Israeli custody was abducted in Egypt, Palestinians say," Reuters, July 30, 2013, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/30/us-palestinians-israel-egypt-idUSBRE96T16420130730>>.

⁷⁸ Jack Khoury and news agencies, "In major shakeup, Egypt's Morsi fires intelligence chief, Sinai governor," *Haaretz*, August 8, 2012, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/in-major-shakeup-egypt-s-morsi-fires-intelligence-chief-sinai-governor-1.456893>>.

⁷⁹ Avi Issacharoff, Gili Cohen, and Yanir Yagna, "Armed militants attack Egyptian army outpost, try to infiltrate Israel border," *Haaretz*, August 5, 2012, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/armed-militants-attack-egyptian-army-outpost-try-to-infiltrate-israel-border-1.456159>>.

⁸⁰ Allyn Fisher-Ilan, "Israel shoots down rocket targeting resort city Eilat," Reuters, August 13, 2013, <<http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE97C00420130813?irpc=932>>.

explosion.⁸¹ On background, Israeli and western officials acknowledged an Israeli strike, and even the Egyptian military at first pointed to Israel—with Egyptian cooperation—before it recognized the domestic repercussions.⁸² The following day, the Egyptian military denied any cooperation with Israel and claimed the militants were killed by Apache fire, while the Israeli defense minister spoke of his government’s respect for Egyptian sovereignty.⁸³ Although it is unlikely that the Egyptian and Israeli militaries are working together at a tactical level, it appears an Israeli intelligence asset noticed the Ansar operatives and alerted the Egyptian military. If Israel did carry out the strike, it is likely that it gave Egypt the opportunity to respond but acted—with permission—when the Apache could not get there in time.

EGYPTIAN CAPABILITIES

As the sovereign over the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt is in the best position to counter threats to its own security and to that of its neighbors. Unlike Israel or Hamas, Egyptian operations in Sinai would not cause an international crisis—unless they ever cross the line into the type of brutality seen in Libya and Syria. The rare exception to this is the fact that Egypt must either operate under the limitations of Annex I of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty or else receive Israeli agreement to alter those limitations. Many Egyptians blame the treaty for allowing insecurity to grow in Sinai. Treaty Annex I establishes troop

and equipment limits in three different “zones” of the peninsula. After more than 30 years of peace, Egyptian military leaders point out the “embarrassment” they face by not having full sovereignty over Egyptian territory; while the military, politicians, and the general public argue that it is these limitations that have allowed armed Bedouin, criminals, and Salafi-jihadis to overrun Sinai.

However, the claim that Egypt cannot deploy effective forces in the Sinai Peninsula because of the treaty annex is entirely false. It is based on a lack of public understanding of the treaty guidelines and mechanisms, as well as regular attempts by those that do understand to use the general misperception to their advantage. Annex I of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty does stipulate limitations for deployment in Sinai, as well as a narrow strip on the Israeli side of the international border. Some Egyptian politicians and political organizations—such as Hamdeen Sabbahi and the Tamarrod movement—have called for the breach or cancellation of the treaty because of these limits.⁸⁴ However, Article IV of the treaty specifically notes, “The security arrangements . . . may at the request of either party be reviewed and amended by mutual agreement of the Parties.”⁸⁵ Therefore, the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty itself does not need to be “cancelled” in order for additional troops to be deployed.

Short of actually amending the treaty is the “Agreed Arrangements” mechanism, mentioned above. There

⁸¹ Sheera Frenkel, Twitter post, August 9, 2013, 12:12p.m., <<https://twitter.com/sheeraf/status/365868274858205185>>; and “Sky News: Apache helicopters flying south of Rafah after hearing explosions at the border line” (Sky News: marwahayat Apache tahalaq janubi Rafah ba’d sama’ dawa infajarat ‘and al-sharit al-hududa), *al-Balad*, August 9, 2013, <<http://www.el-balad.com/579380>>.

⁸² Angus MacSwan, “Four Islamist militants killed in Egypt near Israel: sources,” Reuters, August 9, 2013, <<http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE9780TB20130809?irpc=932>>; Ashraf Sweilam, “Officials: Israeli drone strike kills 5 in Egypt,” Associated Press, August 9, 2013, <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/officials-israeli-drone-strike-kills-5-egypt>>; and Associated Press, Jack Khoury, and Gili Cohen, “Egyptian officials: Israeli drone strikes Sinai rocket-launching site, kills five,” *Haaretz*, August 11, 2013, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/premium-1.540699>>.

⁸³ Gili Cohen and the Associated Press, “Defense Minister on Sinai drone strike: Israel respects Egypt’s sovereignty,” *Haaretz*, August 11, 2013, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.540769>>.

⁸⁴ “Presidential hopeful Sabbahi for non-Islamist Egypt, against Camp David treaty,” *Abram Online*, April 23, 2012, <<http://english.ahram.org/News/39971.aspx>>; and “Tamarrod starts petition to reject US aid, scrap peace treaty with Israel,” *Egypt Independent*, August 17, 2013, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/tamarrod-starts-petition-reject-us-aid-scrap-peace-treaty-israel>>.

⁸⁵ “Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt,” March 26, 1979, available at The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/isegypt.asp>.

have been a number of major adjustments to the “allowed” forces, both before and after the Egyptian revolution. As then-U.S. ambassador Anne Patterson told an Egyptian interviewer this spring, Egyptian force and equipment levels are constantly evaluated and adjusted through this process.⁸⁶ To date, Israel has granted such a waiver to the annex limitations at every request; although there was one incident, which panicked Israeli leaders, in which the Egyptian military moved tanks into Sinai without first running the move through the proper channels.⁸⁷

Egyptian military leaders recognize that Sinai’s security problems cannot be solved through military might alone. The Egyptian armed forces could kill every inhabitant of Sinai in a matter of hours, as one Egyptian general put it, but this is in no way the desired means of Egyptian efforts.⁸⁸ Indeed, the overreaction of Egypt’s interior ministry after the bombings of 2004-2006—mass arrests without evidence, rounding up whole families to force fugitives’ surrenders, and the torture of suspects—led to many of the problems of today.

One concern is that the Egyptian army’s operations following Morsi’s ouster may be repeating many of these tactics. Egyptian sensitivity about such tactics has led to both a propaganda campaign by Sinai’s Salafi-jihadis against the armed forces and military restrictions on independent reporting in areas where operations are being conducted. Indeed, a positive relationship with Sinai’s Bedouin population would be an asset for Egypt, and is one which must be

cultivated if Egyptian—and international—interests in Sinai are to be met.

The inter-connected flow of weapons and foreign fighters with the Salafi-jihadi problem in Sinai and Gaza means that getting control of its other borders will help Egypt protect its border with Israel and Gaza, and the peninsula more generally. In 2012 the Egyptian and U.S. militaries worked together to reallocate \$150 million from the annual U.S. aid package for border security, surveillance, and training in Egypt’s west and south.⁸⁹ Coinciding with calls for reallocation of aid in Washington, sources in Cairo noted that everything Egypt needed for appropriate security had already been provided.⁹⁰

Sinai itself, being a peninsula, has natural choke-points to stop contraband heading to North Sinai and Gaza. The Egyptian army frequently posts to its Facebook page stories and photographs of weapons, drugs, and trafficked Africans captured either in or on their way to Sinai.⁹¹

Another border issue for Egypt is the tunnels between Sinai and Gaza. From the Israeli perspective, these tunnels provide Hamas—and worse groups—with an endless supply of weapons with which to threaten Israeli civilians. The Egyptian perspective is quite different. Egyptian military leaders are opposed to illegal arms smuggling through the tunnels—primarily because of the implications on Egyptian sovereignty, as well as the fact that many of the weapons stay in Egypt. However, Egyptians are sympathetic to the

⁸⁶ Anne Patterson, Interview with Hona al-Asema, CBC Egypt, published on YouTube, May 20, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJ3w_siPCOY&feature=youtu.be>.

⁸⁷ Allyn Fisher-Ilan, “Egypt deployment of armour in Sinai worries Israel,” Reuters, August 21, 2012, <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/08/21/uk-israel-egypt-idUKBRE87K0TY20120821>>.

⁸⁸ Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013.

⁸⁹ Interview with first U.S. official, February 4, 2013.

⁹⁰ Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013.

⁹¹ “Border guards seized 23 tunnel openings on the border with the Gaza Strip” (Quwat haris al-hudud tudbut 23 fatiha nafaq ‘ala al-hudud ma’ quta’ Gaza), Official Facebook page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, Facebook media, May 20, 2013, <<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.315024638628525.1073741871.217455035052153&type=3&l=c2a43e74fb>>; Official Facebook page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, Facebook photo, June 3, 2013, <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=321199678011021&l=ff77537178>>; and Official Facebook page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, Facebook photo, June 5, 2013, <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=322000594597596&l=1f47c8187d>>. One consideration, worthy of greater research, is whether Egyptian authorities are intercepting more arms shipments because of an increased vigilance and capability or if an increase in smuggling has resulted in an increased gross interdiction at a similar rate as before.

economic hardships of Gaza, and view the tunnels as a lifeline for the Palestinian population. As one general put it, “Gaza is not a normal border,” implying that the Egyptians may be more willing to crack down on the tunnels if Israel allowed a normal flow of goods in and out of the strip.⁹²

Given that understanding, Egyptian counter-tunnel operations that began in earnest in February 2013 seem out of place. Not so if the tunnels are viewed as a threat from the other direction. Egypt may have been willing to turn a blind eye to Palestinian smuggling of food, fuel, and building materials—and accepted that occasionally weapons got through as well. However, Egyptian military and intelligence leaders came to the realization that weapons and trained fighters going in could also come out. Egypt acted against the tunnels not as a favor to Israel, but because they are seen as a direct threat to Egyptian security.⁹³ At the same time, operations to destroy the tunnels provoke a number of actors—from Bedouin smugglers to Hamas and Salafi-jihadi groups—that may lash out at Egyptian forces or policymakers in retaliation. Hamas leaders have criticized Egyptian efforts to shut down the tunnels.⁹⁴

In addition to the specific counter-smuggling operations, the Egyptian military is also focused on stabilizing Sinai by countering terrorists, criminals, and general lawlessness. To that end, it launched

Operation Eagle in mid-August 2011—shortly before the cross-border attack on Israel.⁹⁵ As part of the operation, the Egyptian military and police sent two special forces brigades deep into Sinai.⁹⁶ Frequent attacks against an al-Arish police station and the gas pipeline serving Israel and Jordan as well as a demonstration by a group claiming affiliation with al-Qa’ida were the impetus for the military’s move, which specifically targeted the perpetrators of these attacks.⁹⁷

Operation Eagle was also the first time Egypt deployed tanks around Sinai’s northeastern cities of al-Arish, Shaykh Zuweid, and Rafah since the signing of the 1979 peace treaty.⁹⁸ This heavy weaponry and influx of forces was approved by Israel for Egyptian use in restoring security in the restive Sinai Peninsula.⁹⁹ As one Israeli official told *The Jerusalem Post* at the time, “Lack of law and order in Sinai can be dangerous for the region. It can allow extremists to be active in Sinai. We do not want to see Sinai become a launching pad for terrorism.”¹⁰⁰ Steven A. Cook noted that Egypt’s deployment put Israel in a difficult position. “At the moment countenancing Egyptian forces in the Sinai is certainly better than a further deterioration of the Sinai’s security,” he wrote on his blog.¹⁰¹ At the same time, the deployment “has a clear political benefit” for the Egyptian military, and this may push it to remain deployed in Sinai long-term, in contradiction to the peace treaty limitations.

⁹² Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013.

⁹³ Paul Taylor and Yasmine Saleh, “Egypt flooded tunnels to cut Gaza arms flow: aide,” Reuters, February 18, 2013, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/18/us-palestinians-tunnels-egypt-idUSBRE91H0JA20130218>>.

⁹⁴ “Hamas condemns destruction of smuggling tunnels to Gaza,” *Egypt Independent*, February 21, 2013, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/hamas-condemns-destruction-smuggling-tunnels-gaza>>.

⁹⁵ Ahmed Eleiba, “In Sinai everything is possible: Egyptian army’s Operation Eagle is open-ended,” *Ahram Online*, August 26, 2011, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/19747.aspx>>.

⁹⁶ Osama Khaled, “Special forces deployed to Sinai to restore security,” *Egypt Independent*, August 11, 2011, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/special-forces-deployed-sinai-restore-security>>.

⁹⁷ Mohamed Fadel Fahmy, “Egypt cracks down on terror cells in Sinai; bin Laden’s doctor spotted,” CNN, August 16, 2011, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/08/16/egypt.sinai/>>.

⁹⁸ Salah ElBoluk, “Army tanks in N. Sinai for first time since Israeli peace treaty,” *Egypt Independent*, August 14, 2011, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/army-tanks-n-sinai-first-time-israeli-peace-treaty>>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Yaakov Katz, “Egypt launches massive operation to control Sinai,” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 14, 2011, <<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Egypt-launches-massive-operation-to-control-Sinai>>.

¹⁰¹ Steven A. Cook, “The Eagle Has Landed... In Sinai?,” *From the Potomac to the Euphrates*, Council on Foreign Relations, August 17, 2011, <<http://blogs.cfr.org/cook/2011/08/17/the-eagle-has-landed%E2%80%A6in-sinai/>>.

The Egyptian military redoubled efforts following the August 2012 attack that killed 16 soldiers. This ramp up was initially termed “Eagle II,” and then Operation Sinai, before spokesmen just returned to calling it Operation Eagle. The new phase of the operation was intended at first to secure vital infrastructure in Sinai.¹⁰² However, as military and police checkpoints continued to come under attack, the operation’s objective expanded “to confront criminals and achieve security and stability in Sinai.”¹⁰³

In conjunction with the military operation, leaders of Egypt’s Salafi groups—including al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya, which is still on the U.S. foreign terrorist list—conducted a “political dialogue” with Salafi-jihadi groups in Sinai.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, not long after the increased operational activity began, several Egyptian newspapers reported a transition to an operational stage of “diplomacy and negotiations with Bedouin tribes...”¹⁰⁵

As August 2012 ended, the armed forces reported killing 11, arresting 23, and uncovering a large amount of weapons and ammunition.¹⁰⁶ At the time, it was announced that the operation would continue until “all terrorist and criminal activity is

quashed.”¹⁰⁷ However, by early September reports indicated that Egyptian forces had pulled back and that the tanks had been withdrawn from Sinai.¹⁰⁸

Despite action taken to block or destroy tunnels under the Gaza border as part of Operation Eagle, the methods used had little effect on smuggling, and underground trade continued normally.¹⁰⁹ Given the nature of Sinai and the sensitivity of military operations in particular, Egyptian and international reports provided mixed information, with some documenting intense operations and others quoting witnesses saying all was quiet.¹¹⁰

Egyptian officials continued to announce military successes into October, but independent newspapers questioned whether any significant military operation continued.¹¹¹ At the opposite end of the spectrum, some Sinai activists criticized the government’s response as a return to the failed security approach of the Mubarak regime.¹¹² Asked if Operation Eagle was still on-going in February 2013, an Egyptian journalist responded, “There is no military operation in Sinai now.”¹¹³ A more diplomatic foreign interlocutor in Cairo said the answer depended on one’s definition of “on-going.”

¹⁰² Ahmed Eleiba, Hatem Maher, and Sherif Tarek, “‘Operation Eagle’ will not stop until Sinai is terror-free: Egypt’s military,” *Ahram Online*, August 8, 2012, <<http://english.ahram.org/News/49956.aspx>>.

¹⁰³ “Operation Eagle to continue, say military sources,” *Egypt Independent*, August 28, 2012, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/operation-eagle-continue-say-military-sources>>.

¹⁰⁴ Ahmed Eleiba, “Egypt’s ‘Operation Eagle’ Sinai campaign draws mixed reviews,” *Ahram Online*, September 4, 2012, <<http://english.ahram.org/News/52021.aspx>>.

¹⁰⁵ Jano Charbel, “Wednesday’s papers: Morsy in China, migrants and Operation Eagle,” *Egypt Independent*, August 29, 2012, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/wednesday-s-papers-morsy-china-migrants-and-operation-eagle>>.

¹⁰⁶ “23 terrorist suspects arrested, 11 killed in ‘Operation Eagle’: Defence ministry,” *Ahram Online*, August 29, 2012, <<http://english.ahram.org/News/51518.aspx>>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ahmed Eleiba, “Egypt’s ‘Operation Eagle’ Sinai campaign draws mixed reviews,” *Ahram Online*, September 4, 2012, <<http://english.ahram.org/News/52021.aspx>>; and “Armed Forces adopt new strategy in Operation Eagle, says military source,” *Egypt Independent*, September 6, 2012, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/armed-forces-adopt-new-strategy-operation-eagle-says-military-source>>.

¹⁰⁹ “Armed Forces adopt new strategy in Operation Eagle, says military source,” *Egypt Independent*, September 6, 2012, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/armed-forces-adopt-new-strategy-operation-eagle-says-military-source>>.

¹¹⁰ “Operation Eagle to continue, say military sources,” *Egypt Independent*, August 28, 2012, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/operation-eagle-continue-say-military-sources>>.

¹¹¹ Heba Afify, “Wednesday’s papers: Eagle or no eagle?,” *Egypt Independent*, October 3, 2012, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/wednesday-s-papers-eagle-or-no-eagle>>.

¹¹² Ahmad Eleibah, “Egypt’s ‘Operation Eagle’: Army boasts ‘successes’ as criticisms mount,” *Ahram Online*, September 2, 2012, <<http://english.ahram.org/News/51761.aspx>>.

¹¹³ Mohamed Amin ElMasry (journalist, *al-Ahram*), in discussion with the author, February 3, 2013.

Despite these criticisms, U.S. and Egyptian officials argued that Sinai was markedly more secure by early 2013 than it had been just a few months prior.¹¹⁴ As one Egyptian general stated, “Right now security in Sinai is better than you are imagining.” The Egyptian military presented the threat as one of “criminal elements,” rejecting the U.S. assessment of al-Qa’ida-inspired elements in Sinai.¹¹⁵ To some extent, however, this was more of a public front than a total understanding. If the generals truly believed the problem to be a criminal one, and not an issue of radical al-Qa’ida-inspired ideology, they would not tout government-sponsored counter-radicalization programs in Sinai.¹¹⁶ Following Morsi’s removal, the Egyptian military was much more vocal about the violent Islamist threat in Sinai—and blamed the deposed president for it, in an apparent effort to tie the Muslim Brotherhood to Salafi-jihadis.

The Egyptian military itself is wary of Sinai operations. Military leaders see their role as protecting Egypt from external threats, and they view Sinai security as a policing issue, in the sense that it is not the military’s responsibility to be patrolling the country.¹¹⁷ The Egyptian military holds that policing Sinai is the role of the ministry of interior and the police force, while acknowledging that both spoiled any good will from Sinai’s population. As such, most of the Egyptian army’s operations in Sinai have consisted of backing up police operations, thereby giving the police and border guards the confidence to act against criminal elements.¹¹⁸

There are also challenges to Egyptian capabilities in Sinai. From a counterterrorism and counter-insurgency perspective, the Egyptian military has not gone through the post-9/11 doctrinal shift that the U.S. military has experienced. The Egyptian military still thinks in terms of large land wars.¹¹⁹ Indeed, the Egyptian military does not want to move away from its “land army” doctrine, and has pushed back against U.S. suggestions that it do so. From the U.S. perspective, the likelihood of a state-on-state conflict is miniscule in comparison to actual threats that Egypt faces. The Egyptians disagree. One Egyptian general noted that Egypt borders Libya, Sudan, and Israel—suggesting the main threat Egypt faces is invasion by one of these states—and that, unlike the United States, the Egyptian military has historically had to fight wars inside its borders.¹²⁰

Regarding counter-smuggling capabilities, the United States spent \$30 million to provide Egypt with a Border Tunnel Activity Detection System (BTADS), a counter-smuggling tool designed by BBN Technologies and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2009.¹²¹ BTADS was developed specifically for the Egypt-Gaza border, but it is a complicated system and the unrest in Sinai has limited U.S. technical assistance in its operations.¹²² Egyptian military sources, however, claim the system is working effectively—although that it is overwhelmed by the large number of existing tunnels.¹²³ In late September 2013, the Egyptian military’s spokesman told al-Arabia TV that Egypt is continuing to use this technology to uncover tunnels.¹²⁴

¹¹⁴ Interview with first U.S. official, February 4, 2013.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013; and interview with third U.S. official, February 4, 2013.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013.

¹¹⁷ Interview with third U.S. official, February 4, 2013.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Interview with Egyptian military officials, March 8, 2013.

¹²¹ Interview with first U.S. official, February 4, 2013; and Raytheon BBN Technologies, “Science Development Program” (Cambridge, Mass.: 2009): 11-12, available at <<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/99442213/SCIENCE-DEVELOPMENT-PROGRAM-persistent-innovation>>.

¹²² Interview with first U.S. official, February 4, 2013.

¹²³ Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013.

¹²⁴ “Official reveals Egypt receiving US supplies to destroy tunnels with Gaza,” *Middle East Monitor*, September 23, 2013, <<http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/africa/7488-official-reveals-egypt-receiving-us-supplies-to-destroy-tunnels-with-gaza>>.

The major question of “will” versus “capability” was answered in the month prior to Morsi’s removal, when Egyptian forces again stepped up their campaign against the Gaza tunnels. By one measure, the amount of fuel entering Gaza through the tunnels in the last week of June 2013 was around 10 percent of that entering at the beginning of the month.¹²⁵ According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “These amounts were the lowest recorded since August 2012.”¹²⁶ This suggested that Egyptian forces indeed had the capability to effectively shut the tunnels, it was a lack of will to act that stopped them from doing so previously—when such action was not perceived as protecting Egyptian sovereignty.

The latest clampdown on tunnels was toughest during the first week of July, when the military removed Morsi from power. In that week, OCHA estimated that fewer than 10 tunnels were operational.¹²⁷ Even with a slight easing, the tunnels have yet to return to their “normal” post-Mubarak traffic. On July 23, Robert Serry, UN Middle East peace envoy, spoke to the Security Council about Egypt’s crackdown on the tunnels, saying, “As a result of these actions against illegal activity, according to some estimates, 80 percent of the tunnels are no longer functioning.”¹²⁸ By the end of August, Raed

Fattouh, president of the PA coordination committee for the entry of goods to Gaza, told *al-Monitor* that Gaza’s tunnels were only functioning at 30 percent of their capacity.¹²⁹ The post-Morsi counter-tunnel operations were the most sustained effort to date. By one count, there had been around 300 tunnels operating before the endeavor and by late September still only around 10 were open.¹³⁰ According to another report, fuel was still being smuggled through the open tunnels—at less than half the rate as during early 2013—but exclusively for the use of Gaza’s power station.¹³¹

In addition to its ability to act on its side of the Gaza border, Egypt also has leverage over Hamas to encourage the Palestinian group to act inside Gaza: trading its short term interest of keeping the tunnels open with its long-term interest of maintaining working relations with Egypt. Despite its insistence that the August 2012 attack on Egyptian soldiers had nothing to do with Gaza, Hamas promptly closed the openings on its side of the tunnels.¹³² Hamas did so again in the wake of the May 2013 kidnapping of Egyptian security forces: declaring the entire border area a “closed military zone.”¹³³ Even prior to the 2011 uprising, Egypt was able to successfully demand that Hamas close its tunnels in urgent situations.¹³⁴

¹²⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs occupied Palestinian territory, “Protection of Civilians Weekly Report 25 June - 1 July 2013,” <http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_protection_of_civilians_weekly_report_2013_07_05_english.pdf>: 3-4.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*: 3.

¹²⁷ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs occupied Palestinian territory, “Protection of Civilians Weekly Report 2-8 July 2013,” <http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_protection_of_civilians_weekly_report_2013_07_12_english.pdf>: 4-5.

¹²⁸ Michelle Nichols, “U.N. says Egypt crackdown closes 80 percent of Gaza tunnels,” Reuters, July 23, 2013, <<http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE96M10J20130723?irpc=932>>.

¹²⁹ Asmaa al-Ghoul, “Israeli Goods Enter Gaza as Egypt Tightens Siege,” *al-Monitor*, August 29, 2013, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/israel-gaza-erez-karam-abu-salem-crossing.html>>.

¹³⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs occupied Palestinian territory, “Situation Report: The humanitarian impact of reduced access between Gaza and Egypt,” September 23, 2013, <http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_sitrep_2013_09_23_english.pdf>: 1-2.

¹³¹ Gisha - Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, “Update: Construction materials transferred from Israel to Gaza’s private sector, Rafah Crossing closed until further notice, significant drop in entrance of fuel via tunnels,” September 24, 2013, <http://www.gisha.org/item.asp?lang_id=en&p_id=2117>.

¹³² Ahmed Aldabba, “Sinai attack seals up Gaza to outside world,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 6, 2012, <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/0806/Sinai-attack-seals-up-Gaza-to-outside-world-video>>.

¹³³ Luiz Sanchez, “Hamas declares border a ‘closed military zone,’” *Daily News Egypt*, May 20, 2013, <<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/05/20/hamas-declares-border-a-closed-military-zone/>>.

¹³⁴ Linda Gradstein, “Gaza Tunnels Closed Amid Sinai Kidnapping Threat,” *AOL News*, April 14, 2010, <<http://www.aolnews.com/2010/04/14/gaza-tunnels-closed-amid-sinai-kidnapping-threat/>>.

Without Morsi at the helm, Egypt may not have political leverage over Hamas in the same way as when the Muslim Brotherhood was ascendant. However, Egyptian security and intelligence bodies still have significant hard power leverage, as they did during Mubarak's rule—and now Hamas is also weaker and more isolated. In the months following the coup, Egyptian leaders have continuously warned Hamas about Gaza-based national security concerns.¹³⁵ Such threats have a dual purpose. The primary goal is to pressure Hamas to crackdown on anti-Egyptian elements in Gaza, which by some accounts is working.¹³⁶ Equally important, however, is the impact such allegations have on Egyptian public opinion, which may not otherwise support the military's crackdown on Gaza's lifeline.

Finally, according to some Salafis in Gaza, the Egyptian intelligence service is also involved in the monitoring of Gaza-based Salafi-jihadi groups. These individuals claim that Hamas makes arrests at the request of Egyptian intelligence and even that Egyptian interrogators are involved in questioning detainees.¹³⁷

HAMAS'S CAPABILITIES

In its quest for full control of Gaza, Hamas's authoritarian rule gives the movement an edge in intelligence and operational capabilities over rival groups in the strip. Its administration of the small territory also gives it significant leverage over the population.

At the intelligence level, security forces and informant networks can be used to monitor threats to Hamas's rule. Publicly, focus may be on weeding out Israeli informants, but these same networks could also infiltrate Salafi-jihadi organizations.¹³⁸ Hamas was long at the forefront of resistance activities and Islamic revival in Gaza; as such, many Salafi-jihadis are former Hamas operatives, who either went beyond Hamas's call or became disenchanted with its current positions.¹³⁹ Past coordination between Hamas and Salafi-jihadis, relationships with former Hamas fighters, and infiltration of still-current operatives give Hamas insight into Salafi-jihadi ideology, plans, and operations.

The tunnels also provide Hamas with intelligence about the importation of weapons and fighters by Gaza-based Salafi-jihadi groups. Hamas leaders have been trying to gain control over every single tunnel.¹⁴⁰ To the extent that it is able to do so, the governing authority has the ability to keep tabs on persons entering and exiting Gaza. Relationships with tunnel owners and laborers also allow Hamas to monitor when local arms dealers import weapons and learn which shipments are filling stores other than its own.

Since taking over Gaza, Hamas has at times allowed other Palestinian clans and organizations to operate but also has gone after them when such operations—or aspirations—challenge Hamas rule. For example, in August 2009, Hamas fighters laid siege

¹³⁵ "Egypt warns of 'harsh' response against Hamas," Agence France-Presse and *al-Masry al-Youm*, September 25, 2013, available at <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-warns-harsh-response-against-hamas>>.

¹³⁶ Yang Yi, ed., "Hamas takes security measures to ease tension with Egypt," Xinhua, September 14, 2013, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-09/14/c_132720868.htm>.

¹³⁷ "Gaza Salafists slam Hamas for post-Sinai attack crackdown," Agence France-Presse, August 18, 2012, available at <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/gaza-salafists-slam-hamas-post-sinai-attack-crackdown>>; and Kifah Ziboun, "Salafi Leader in Gaza on Attacks Against Israel," *Asharq al-Awsat*, April 21, 2013, <<http://www.aawsat.net/2013/04/article55299407>>.

¹³⁸ Matthew Kalman, "Hamas victim dragged through the streets of Gaza City Tuesday by motorcycle was no collaborator, widow says," *New York Daily News*, November 26, 2012, <<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/hamas-victim-dragged-streets-collaborator-widow-article-1.1208004>>.

¹³⁹ Isabel Kershner and Fares Akram, "Gazan Killed After Israeli Is Stabbed to Death in the West Bank," *The New York Times*, April 30, 2013, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/01/world/middleeast/israeli-airstrike-kills-palestinian-in-gaza.html>>.

¹⁴⁰ Fares Akram, "Hamas mulls control of illegal human traffic between Gaza, Egypt," Xinhua, August 8, 2011, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-08/08/c_131036640.htm>.

to a mosque where Abdul Latif Musa of Jund Ansar Allah had called for an Islamic emirate in Gaza.¹⁴¹ More recently, Hamas has wanted to be in charge of decision-making on the resistance front. That is, just as the Israeli government holds Hamas responsible no matter which group fires rockets, Hamas too wants to be calling the shots. Salafi-jihadi groups

in Gaza, Sinai, and even as far afield as Syria have released online statements of complaints about the confiscation of weapons and arrests of fighters by Hamas forces.¹⁴² In May 2013, Hamas even deployed forces to border-areas with Israel and to well-known rocket-launching sites to halt unauthorized attempts to attack its sworn enemy.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Mai Yagh, "Gaza clashes between Hamas, Islamist radicals kill 13," Agence France-Presse, August 14, 2009, available at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hiMklyHpT_eclnRgahd3X66DV45Q>.

¹⁴² "Ibn Taymiyyah Center for Media presents a new video message from Katibat al-Muhajirin in Bilad al-Sham's Abu Talhah al-Libi: 'Oh Hamas, Fear God,'" available at *Jihadology*, May 21, 2013, <<http://jihadology.net/2013/05/21/ibn-taymiyyah-center-for-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-katibat-al-muhajirin-in-bilad-al-shams-abu-tal%E1%B8%A5ah-al-libi-oh-hamas-fear-god/>>.

¹⁴³ Kifah Ziboun, "Hamas's Military Wing Securing Borders with Israel," *Asharq al-Awsat*, May 1, 2013, <<http://m.asharq-e.com/content/1367417543747985900/Top%20Stories>>; and "Hamas arrests hardline Islamists over rocket attacks," Agence France-Presse, March 23, 2013, available at <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4360106,00.html>>.

BARRIERS TO COOPERATION

Despite the strong security ties, Israeli leaders must accept that the Egyptian-Israeli political relationship is unlikely to return to its pre-revolution state, when an Israeli prime minister could call up an Egyptian president in time of need. This does not mean the peace treaty will be broken, as its maintenance is in Egypt's interest as well: not just because of western aid, but because of international legitimacy and diplomatic relations, its ability to focus manpower elsewhere, and the benefits of intelligence cooperation with Israel. However, an Egyptian population raised on anti-Israel propaganda will keep Egypt's president, whoever he is, from appearing to be acting in the interest of Israeli security concerns.

Israel could build trust and provide a political win for Egypt's leaders by showing a willingness to formally negotiate changes to the peace treaty security annex. Such a development would recognize that the threat Israel now faces from its neighbor is not an invading army but small-scale attacks out of a lawless region. However, Israeli leaders have warned of the "slippery slope" of allowing Egypt to deploy into Sinai: concerned that this would lead to a permanent change, and worried that somewhere down the road an Egyptian regime might not support

peaceful relations.¹⁴⁴ There are political costs to both sides in opening up the treaty, would provide opportunities for political opponents in both countries to derail the process. At the same time, if Israel did provide Egypt with unfettered sovereignty over Sinai, the Egyptian government would have fewer excuses for the unstable situation in the peninsula, which to some extent is an outcome of its own policies. Moving forward, for international audiences, Egyptian military and political leaders will continue to insist on their commitment to peace and the security of Israel. However, for domestic consumption, Egypt needs to be seen as changing its policies and acting in its own national interests.

The need to shift perceptions to Egyptian security interests actually negatively impacts the Egyptian relationship with Hamas. A longstanding distrust of Hamas by Egypt's intelligence services, which ties Hamas to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, and the perceived threat emanating from Hamas-controlled Gaza have culminated in a media war against the Palestinian group. For Egyptian media, especially anti-Brotherhood media, Hamas plays both a "foreign finger" and—as a Brotherhood offshoot—a militia acting in concert with other Islamist forces. Invariably, leaked—or entirely made up—stories

¹⁴⁴ Attila Somfalvi, "Lieberman: Don't let Egypt get away with violations," *Ynet News*, August 22, 2012, <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4271499,00.html>>.

turn Egyptian public opinion against Hamas for its alleged involvement in everything from prison breaks during the revolution, to killing Egyptian soldiers, to secretly plotting to resettle Palestinians in Sinai.¹⁴⁵

Meanwhile, although ending the tunnel trade is in the interest of both Egypt and Israel, Hamas depends on the tunnels: for importing goods and materials that serve the population, for accessing weapons and trainers for its own needs, and for the income it gains in taxing these imports. The former can be addressed by normal border-crossing activities—either from Egypt or Israel. A “normal border-crossing,” however, is constrained by the Israeli policy of isolating Gaza as long as it is run by Hamas. On the other side, both Israel and Hamas would like to put more responsibility for Gaza into Egyptian hands, an outcome Egypt has wanted to avoid since Mubarak’s rule.

Tax revenues for Hamas—used both for violence and for governing Gaza—is a more complex matter related to the most difficult aspect of this trilateral relationship: Israeli-Hamas cooperation. Despite each side’s disregard for the other, both Hamas and Israel have accepted unwritten and unsigned agreements, and even been willing to have representatives sitting in adjoining conference rooms during Egyptian-coordinated negotiations; but this has not stopped flare-ups between the two.¹⁴⁶

An end to the tunnel trade would seriously decrease Hamas’s strength and capabilities. While this may be seen as positive by both Israel and Egypt, a weakened Hamas may ironically be more likely to strike out at its neighbors in desperation. Further, if the Hamas government collapses, whatever replaces it—more likely to be anarchy or Salafi-jihadi rule than a return of the administration of the Palestinian Authority—may be even worse for the neighborhood, which is not to suggest that Hamas should get a free pass for uncooperative actions. On Israel’s Channel 2, the new head of Israel’s southern command, which covers Gaza and the Egyptian border, remarked candidly in September that there is no alternative to Hamas for maintaining “calm and security in the Gaza Strip.”¹⁴⁷

Since Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006, Israel has been at the forefront of efforts to keep the movement isolated. A recognizable shift to accepting Hamas as the legitimate ruler of Gaza undermines Israeli attempts both to prop up the moderate Fatah movement and to maintain Hamas’s international isolation. Direct acceptance by either side of the other is extremely unlikely, and any coordination between the two will continue through Egypt as the interlocutor. However, Israeli efforts to undermine Hamas vis-à-vis Fatah or continued Hamas terror plots in the West Bank are likely to impact positive cooperation in Gaza.

¹⁴⁵ “Hamas denies ‘baseless’ claims over 2011 prison breaks,” *Egypt Independent*, June 9, 2013, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/hamas-denies-baseless-claims-over-2011-prison-breaks>>; Ibrahim Barzak, “Report Blames Hamas for Egypt Soldier Killings,” Associated Press, March 14, 2013, <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/report-blames-hamas-egypt-soldier-killings>>; and Ahmed Eleiba, “Accusations against Hamas,” *al-Ahram Weekly*, April 24, 2013, <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/2353/32/Accusations%20against%20Hamas.aspx>>.

¹⁴⁶ “Israeli delegation lands in Cairo for talks,” Ma’an News Agency, April 15, 2013, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=584758>>.

¹⁴⁷ “Top General Says Hamas Control of Gaza Good for Israel Security,” Agence France-Presse, September 24, 2013, available at <<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/99571-top-general-says-hamas-control-of-gaza-good-for-israel-security>>.

TRILATERAL COOPERATION

Israel has the capability to operate in Gaza and even Sinai, but such operations—especially in Egyptian territory—would carry high risks. If these unlikely partners could work together, such cooperation could advance interests of each with lower risks of international blowback. In such a relationship, advanced Israeli intelligence assets could provide early warnings of active terror plots and smuggling operations. This information would be fed to Egyptian security authorities, and main operations would be conducted by the Egyptians. Where relevant, the Egyptians may share information with Hamas authorities when threats are active on the Gaza-side of the border.

For the most part, the first half of this partnership is already in effect. As the public learned in August 2012, Israeli security authorities pass intelligence to their Egyptian counterparts—a relationship that has continued despite the dramatic changes in Egypt’s government in the past two years. While this is a regular occurrence, intelligence-sharing is worthless without an active follow-up. The Egyptian intelligence chief’s failure to take the Israeli warning seriously cost him his job—and 16 soldiers

their lives. Public travel warnings from the Israeli government are often derided by Egyptian political leaders as conspiracies to harm Egypt’s tourism sector.¹⁴⁸

Following the August 2012 attack on Egyptian barracks in Sinai, *The New York Times* reported that Egypt had finally come around to accepting U.S. aid for Sinai security.¹⁴⁹ In 2012, Egypt spent \$150 million on border security, two-thirds of which was spent in August and September. Much of this, though, was allocated to the Libyan and Sudanese borders—not directly to Sinai—for Chinook helicopters, special operations, observation towers, and sensors.¹⁵⁰ According to an Egyptian military source with extensive knowledge of U.S. aid allocations, Egypt’s border security priorities are being fully met by maximizing Foreign Military Financing funds; and funding for border guards has been allocated in the 2013–2017 five-year plan.¹⁵¹ It is as yet unclear whether these expenditures are having the desired effect; however, funding such projects is moving aid in the right direction of addressing mutual interests.

¹⁴⁸ “South Sinai governor: Israeli travel warnings aim to affect tourism in Egypt,” *Egypt Independent*, April 21, 2012, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/south-sinai-governor-israeli-travel-warnings-aim-affect-tourism-egypt>>.

¹⁴⁹ Steven Lee Myers and Thom Shanker, “After Sinai Attack, U.S. and Egypt Step Up Talks on Security,” *The New York Times*, August 11, 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/world/middleeast/egypt-and-us-step-up-talks-on-security-assistance.html?pagewanted=all>>.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with first U.S. official, February 4, 2013.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Egyptian military officials, February 6, 2013.

The U.S. military is also bringing Egyptian border guards and other high-level security figures—such as the head of the Egyptian coast guard—to the United States to learn “best practices” in border surveillance, operations, and intelligence-sharing.¹⁵² U.S. military and intelligence delegations are also regularly traveling to Egypt to discuss, and visit, Sinai.¹⁵³ A March 2013 Egyptian report claimed the military was using foreign satellites to identify smuggling tunnels on the Gaza border.¹⁵⁴ If true, such an operation would be in line with that August 2012 report in the *Times*. “U.S. technological measures made available for Egyptian use, and intelligence cooperation...” were enabling Egypt to prevent “large-scale smuggling of weapons into Gaza,” according to a January 2013 Israeli report.¹⁵⁵

In a February 5, 2013, phone call with his American counterpart, Egyptian defense minister Abd-al-Fattah al-Sisi reiterated “his commitment that the Sinai will not be used as a base to threaten Israel.”¹⁵⁶ Indeed, since the November 2012 Operation Pillar of Defense, a clear understanding has developed between Egypt, Israel, and Hamas. Both written and unwritten agreements have played out to solidify an arrangement that no side may wish to discuss publicly, but which is succeeding in holding calm.

In a written document declaring the November ceasefire, for which Egypt serves as guarantor, Israel and Hamas agreed that—following the cessation of hostilities—“Opening the crossings and facilitating the movements of people and transfer of goods and refraining from restricting residents’ free movements and targeting residents in border areas” would all be on the table.¹⁵⁷ In effect, Israel agreed—for the first time in writing—to a guarantee of “quiet-for-quiet,” with the intended upgrade to “normalcy-for-normalcy.” Days after the ceasefire took hold, Hamas and Israeli officials reportedly held indirect talks on these matters in Cairo.¹⁵⁸ These “meetings” were not a one-time event, continuing even months later.¹⁵⁹ Following Morsi’s removal, Israeli leaders may be encouraged by the added pressure Egypt is putting on Hamas and believe now is a time to renege on the 2012 ceasefire agreement. That would be a mistake, however. Indeed, now, when Hamas is most vulnerable, is the best time for Israel to develop an arrangement for longer-term quiet and stability.

Opening the crossings stands as one of the most difficult roadblocks to “normal” cooperation, which is one reason why some argue for the necessity of internal Palestinian reconciliation.¹⁶⁰ One solution

¹⁵² Interview with second U.S. official, February 4, 2013.

¹⁵³ “US military delegation visits Sinai,” Ma’an News Agency, November 6, 2012, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=534040>>; “Pentagon official arrives in Cairo to discuss Sinai security,” Deutsche Presse-Agentur, November 11, 2012, available at <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/pentagon-official-arrives-cairo-discuss-sinai-security>>; and Basil El-Dabh, “US counterterrorism head arrives in Cairo,” *Daily News Egypt*, January 27, 2013, <<http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/2013/01/27/us-counterterrorism-head-arrives-in-cairo/>>.

¹⁵⁴ Dalia Osman, “Military Source: Army Exploring Sinai Tunnels by Satellite ... and Closing All of Them” (Masdar ‘askari: al-jaysh yastuli’ anfaq Sinai bi al-’aqmar al-sina’iyya.. wa sayaghuquha jami’an), *al-Masry al-Youm*, March 31, 2013, <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/1608526>>.

¹⁵⁵ Elad Benari, “Egypt Prevented 3 Attempts to Smuggle Weapons into Gaza,” *Arutz Sheva*, January 2, 2013, <<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/163796>>.

¹⁵⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, “Readout of Secretary Panetta’s Call with Egyptian Minister of Defense Abd-al-Fattah al-Sisi,” February 5, 2013, <<http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=15802>>.

¹⁵⁷ “TEXT: Cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas,” Reuters, November 21, 2012, available at <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/text-cease-fire-agreement-between-israel-and-hamas.premium-1.479653>>.

¹⁵⁸ Yonatan Gonen, “Israel-Hamas talks to begin in Cairo,” *Ynet News*, November 26, 2012, <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4311836,00.html>>.

¹⁵⁹ Ilan Ben Zion, “Israel and Hamas said to hold indirect talks in Cairo,” *The Times of Israel*, February 15, 2013, <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-and-hamas-said-to-hold-indirect-talks-in-cairo/>>.

¹⁶⁰ Daniel Byman and Khaled Elgindy, “The Deepening Chaos in Sinai,” *The National Interest*, September/October 2013, <<http://nationalinterest.org/article/the-deepening-chaos-sinai-8957?page=show>>.

could be for the Palestinian Authority to run the crossings with all revenue from imports and exports going directly to administering Gaza, instead of ending up in the West Bank government's coffers. Under such an operation, Israel would agree to quiet-for-quiet: the border crossings would operate normally as long as Hamas kept security under control. Unfortunately, Hamas has on previous occasion fought with the Palestinian Authority over revenues.¹⁶¹ As recently as July 2013, President Mahmoud Abbas called for reactivating the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and Agreed Principles for Rafah Crossing, which provided for PA border guards under European oversight.¹⁶² A Hamas spokesman promptly rejected "bringing back the Europeans' and the occupation's intelligence services to work at the Rafah crossing and to control its traffic under the 2005 agreement."¹⁶³

In addition to the tax revenue that Hamas gets from tunnel traffic, consumers also prefer goods that come in through the tunnels because they are cheaper than products that enter legally through Israel—either because they are lower quality or because they are black-market goods that are subsidized for the Egyptian market, such as fuel.¹⁶⁴ Even if Rafah is opened to the transfer of goods, as Hamas requests, the Egyptian authorities would be unwilling to allow such black-market activity above ground. Without the tunnels, then, Gazans will have to pay full market price for fuel and other goods. Of course, Hamas is unlikely to find Egyptians sympathetic to the Palestinian desire to pay rock-bottom prices for goods subsidized out of the Egyptian budget.

The Egyptian military's disinterest in preparing forces for counterterrorism, counter-insurgency, or

counter-smuggling operations is one of the major problems blocking sustained Egyptian action on Israeli, and international, intelligence. For example, the Egyptian army has reported destroying or covering many multiples of the estimated number of tunnels that actually exist under the Gaza border: sometimes tunnels are found and their openings are covered, only to be dug out again when the army withdraws. Similarly, when the Egyptian military has gone on the offensive against Salafi-jihadi groups, it will redeploy or ease up operations without clearing the area of armed elements for the long-term.

This is where the United States can be an effective partner in this trilateral relationship. U.S. aid can provide the proper tools, and the U.S. military can provide the proper training, to give the Egyptian military and police the confidence to take on these threats in Sinai, which have had negative impacts on Egyptian sovereignty and which will continue to grow if unaddressed. The Pentagon has long suggested that Egypt move in this direction. However, the Egyptian military has resisted such assistance in the past, and is likely to continue to be resistant. To date, U.S. administrations have not pushed back. As both the United States and Egypt assess their post-Morsi relationship, however, Sinai security is an area of mutual interest.

Indeed, despite political turmoil in Egypt, Sinai security will continue to be a U.S. priority because of its effect on Israeli security, regional stability as a whole, and the opportunity for al-Qa'ida to take advantage of a security vacuum in the isolated peninsula. For that reason, even when the U.S. government decided to suspend some aid to Egypt

¹⁶¹ "Hamas closes Gaza crossing," Ma'an News Agency, March 7, 2013, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=571269>>.

¹⁶² Asmaa al-Ghoul, "Israeli Goods Enter Gaza as Egypt Tightens Siege," *al-Monitor*, August 29, 2013, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/israel-gaza-erez-karam-abu-salem-crossing.html>>; and Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Agreed documents on movement and access from and to Gaza" November 15, 2005, <<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/MFADocuments/Pages/Agreed%20documents%20on%20movement%20and%20access%20from%20and%20to%20Gaza%2015-Nov-2005.aspx>>.

¹⁶³ Asmaa al-Ghoul, "Israeli Goods Enter Gaza as Egypt Tightens Siege," *al-Monitor*, August 29, 2013, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/israel-gaza-erez-karam-abu-salem-crossing.html>>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

on October 9, 2013, cooperation on Sinai security provides an opportunity for the United States to stay involved and focus its relationship with the Egyptian military on mutual threats and interests despite displeasure on other fronts. Although the aid suspension involves a hold-up of large military systems—most of which are ineffective for counterterrorism anyway—the administration is likely to gain congressional support for a continued focus on funding border security and counterterrorism programs in Egypt.

Another opportunity for U.S. involvement in setting this cooperative relationship between Egypt and Israel could be through the oversight of intelligence sharing between the two. Just as the MFO

oversees security coordination between Egypt and Israel, the United States can operate a kind of fusion-center for intelligence on Sinai threats. In such an environment, Egyptian and Israeli officials could work together, but under the guidance of U.S. officials, whom each side may trust more than they trust each other. Through this mechanism, Israel may also be able to share intelligence with Egypt without giving away its sources or methods: indeed, in some circumstances, U.S. officials could share Israeli intelligence with their Egyptian counterparts without identifying Israel as the source. This would allow Egypt access to Israeli intelligence without creating paranoia over any major Israeli intelligence operations on Egyptian soil.

CONCLUSION

Despite all the changes taking place in Egypt and the broader Middle East following the Arab uprisings, the Egyptian-Israeli relationship remains surprisingly strong. There is a shared understanding of interests and threats, as well as a high degree of communication between the two sides. The biggest problem is not disagreement about threats but disagreement over how to address them. In many ways, addressing these threats in concert will involve an increased capability on the Egyptian side.

A better understanding of the Egypt-Israel-Hamas relationship on the part of Washington would

assuage concerns of Egyptian instability or Israeli security. Congress and the administration can help strengthen this cooperation by providing Egypt with the tools and training necessary for counterterrorism and counter-smuggling operations. The Obama administration should also give the Egyptian government the space to engage with Hamas—which, at times, will be more cooperative than current U.S. policy supports—while continuing to push the Egyptian government to meet its own security needs: needs that, more often than not, align with Israeli and U.S. interests as well.

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Our team includes experienced and knowledgeable scholars, collectively offering decades of experience in government and in the field. Within the Center, a core group of experts conduct original research, bringing keen insight and fresh perspectives to bear on the critical challenges facing the Middle East today and on the policy choices facing American and regional decision makers. Their work is supplemented by nonresident scholars across the Middle East.

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