

Egypt Security Watch Monthly Briefing



Summary

July 2015 saw **128 reports of terror attacks in Egypt**, a 3% decrease from June. It was the seventh month in a row that over 100 attacks were reported in the country, almost four times the rate of last year's average of 30 attacks per month ([Figure 1](#)).

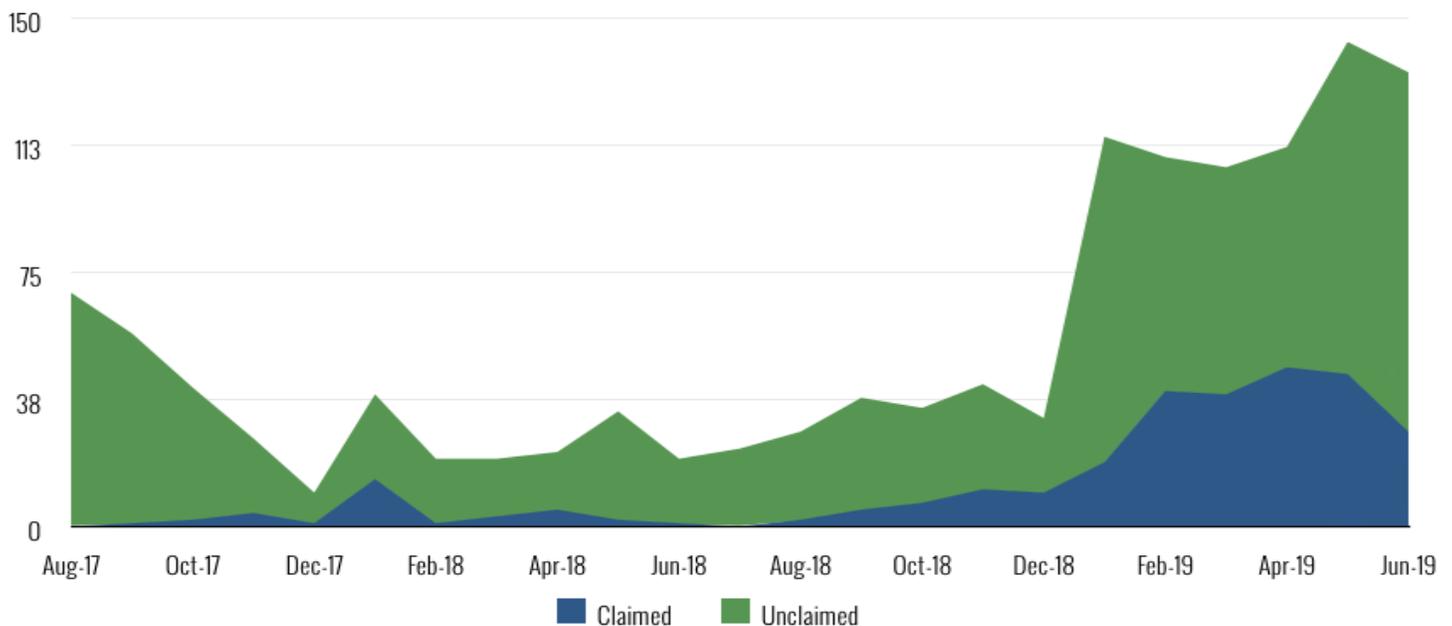
On July 1, **Wilayat Sinai carried out its largest operation to date**. After coordinated attacks on over twenty military installations, militants overtook the city of Sheikh Zuweid for several hours, before being pushed back by F-16 fire. Official army and health ministry attacks listed 21 soldiers killed, while news reports claimed up to 74. (For more insights on the attacks, see TIMEP's special report, [Assault in Sheikh Zuweid: A turning point in Egypt's fight against terrorism](#), and full analysis at the conclusion of this brief.)

On July 11, **the Islamic State carried out an attack on the Italian Consulate** in central Cairo. The attack was claimed by the group's central media, not Wilayat Sinai.¹

A new group al-Qaeda linked group, al-Murabitoon, announced its presence in an audio statement from Egyptian military defector Hisham al-Ashmawy. The group is not known to have carried out any attacks.

In total, the **Allied Popular Resistance Movement (APRM) claimed 13 attacks**: Ajnad Misr claimed one attack; and **Wilayat Sinai claimed 32 attacks** after the July 1 assault, all of which were in North Sinai ([Figure 4](#)).

Figure 1: Reported Attacks By Month

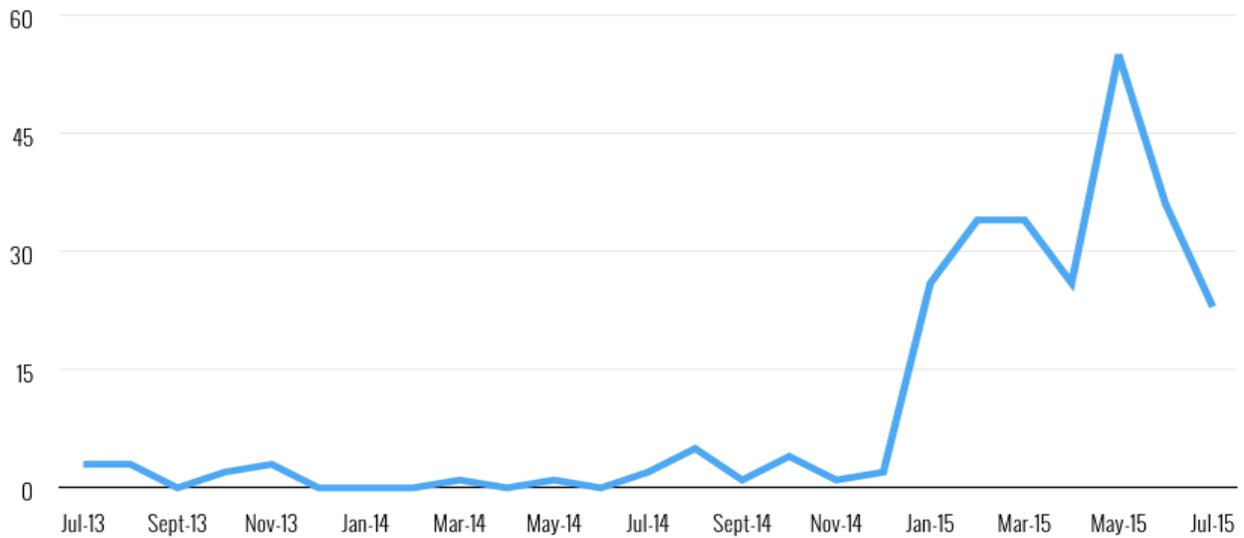


Twenty-three attacks on property targets were reported in July, primarily on electricity infrastructure and security officials' property ([Figure 2](#)).

¹ The claim on the attack was reported in a method similar to that of the attacks on tourist beaches in Tunisia. Typically, the Islamic State will issue claims listing the *wilaya*, or "province," that carried out the attack (for instance, Wilayat Sinai is referenced in Egypt). In the case of the consulate bombing, however, only the location of the attack—Egypt—was announced. Rather than suggest the establishment of a new province, this simply indicates that the attack was conducted by Islamic State-affiliated militants that may not be affiliated with those in Sinai.

Summary

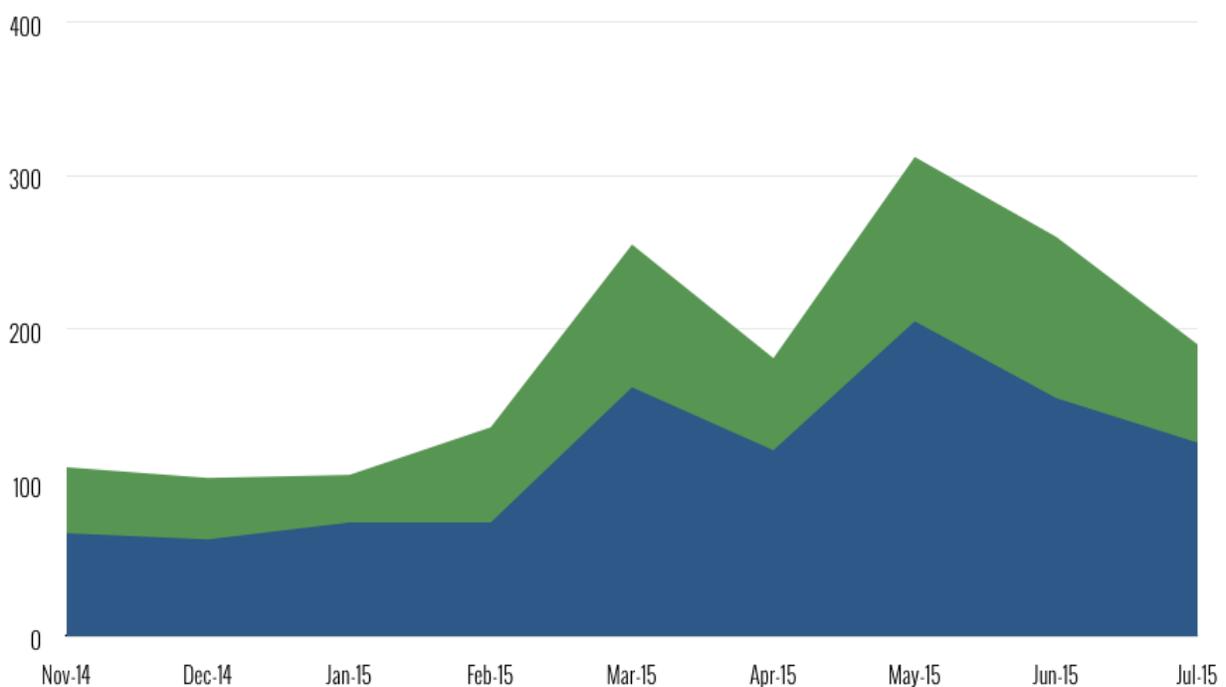
Figure 2: Attacks on Economic/Property Targets



Reported deaths in terror attacks increased from 31 in June to 48 in July, 22 of which were reported in the North Sinai attacks on July 1. Reported civilian casualties decreased from June to July, with six civilians reported killed in July (Figures 6 and 7).

Counter-terror operations decreased, with aggregated **reports of 190 counter-terror operations** in June (after 260 in May). Of these, **126 were reported by official government spokespersons** (military, Ministry of Interior, or State Information Service); the others were reported in the news media or from anonymous security officials' statements (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Counter Terror Operations



Summary

Of all counter-terror operations, 53 were specifically reported in North Sinai and 15 in Greater Cairo. In the 53 operations carried out in North Sinai, [official sources reported having killed 359 individuals](#) in the five days following the July 1 offensive.

A reported **1,412 alleged terrorists were arrested** in June 2015, a decrease from June's figure of 1,614. Of these, **676 were alleged members of the Muslim Brotherhood** ([Figure 9](#)).

This report highlights developments in terror groups and security sector activity, as well as the changing trends in location and character of terror attacks and counter-terror operations, and a description of methodology.

This report highlights developments in terror groups and security sector activity, as well as the changing trends in location and character of terror attacks and counter-terror operations, and a description of methodology.²

² All data in the TIMEP briefings and TIMEP Egypt Security Watch project represents an aggregate of news reports, Egyptian state (military or ministry of interior) social media statements, terror group social media, and data drawn from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset. Figures from previous months are constantly reviewed and revised for further accuracy. For more information on the project's methodology, please see the methodology section of this report.

Terror Groups' Notable Developments:

(Allied) Popular Alliance Movement

The Allied Popular Resistance Movement claimed 13 attacks, all carried out in the first two weeks of the month.

Of the 13 total attacks, **six were claimed by the Popular Resistance Movement**, including a small arms attack on a fast-food restaurant, two improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, and the destruction of a fuel tanker in Assiut. **The seven remaining attacks were claimed by Revolutionary Punishment**, all of which were IED or small arms attacks against police or accused police informants.

A number of the claims referenced specific victims, listing the victim's alleged offenses. These **offenses included providing information to security personal and participating in security campaigns** against militant groups.

Ajnad Misr

After two straight months with no attacks, **Ajnad Misr resumed activity on July 16**, detonating an improvised explosive in Roxy Square in Heliopolis, Cairo. The attack injured one police officer. Ajnad Misr claimed the attack through their social media account, where they also stated that they minimized the size of the explosives in order to prevent civilian casualties.

Ajnad Misr also **released two statements in the month of July**. The first, released on July 23, spoke on the promotions and dismissals occurring within the Ministry of Interior entitled "Successions, Dismissals, and Continuing Operations." **The statement claims that the changes within the MoI, primarily the dismissal of Mohamed Ibrahim, were driven by the failure to stop terrorist activity**. The statement goes on to state that regardless of the changes, terror operations will continue.

Their second statement, released on July 29, refuted media claims that members of Ajnad Misr had been killed in Giza, going on to state that the martyrdom of any of their members would be broadcast by their official social media accounts.

The Islamic State

In their **first official attack on Egyptian territory**, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the July 11 bombing outside the Italian Consulate's compound in downtown Cairo. Notably, the claim, which was circulated by the Islamic State's social media accounts, attributed the attack to the "Islamic State in Egypt," as opposed to the Islamic State's main branch in Egypt, "Sinai Province." The statement also noted that the **attack had employed a 450-kilogram car bomb** and warned Muslims to stay away from similar locations, **"because they are legitimate targets for mujahideen strikes."**

Terror Groups' Notable Developments:

[Wilayat Sinai \(WS\)](#) - Formerly Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis

Wilayat Sinai, the Islamic State's affiliate in Egypt, maintained its **high level of activity throughout the month of July**.

In a significant increase over the months of May and June (25 and 14 attacks respectively), **the group claimed a total of 36 attacks**, excluding the July 1 large-scale coordinated attack across North Sinai. The July 1 attack consisted of over 20 synchronized attacks on multiple checkpoints and other sites in the province, including a police officers club in the capital of Arish and sites throughout the city of Sheikh Zuweid. TIMEP's full analysis of the day's events can be found as an addendum to this brief, and expert insights can be found in the report "[Assault on Sheikh Zuweid: A turning point in Egypt's fight against terrorism.](#)"

The group maintained an active social media presence, with Wilayat Sinai's Media Office using social media to circulate images of the group preaching and giving gifts to young male adolescents in the street. The Media Office also circulated images of the group's combat operations, including the aftermath of an IED attack on a military M60 tank.

On *Wednesday, July 22*, Wilayat Sinai (WS) published a statement of its monthly activities. Excluding the July 1 coordinated attacks, these included twenty attacks³ between July 1 and July 17:⁴

- Six separate IED attacks on homes of police officers, including that of [Police Secretary Muhammad Anas](#); no injuries were reported.
- A [roadside IED attack on a bus carrying police personnel on the al-Arish highway](#). Twenty individuals were reported injured.
- The destruction of two M60 tanks utilizing mortars and IEDs, [killing at least one officer](#).
- Two sniper attacks on military checkpoints, [one in Rafah](#) and one in Sheikh Zuwied.
- A [missile attack on an Egyptian naval boat](#) off the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. The attack caused the boat to catch on fire but no casualties were reported.

Al Murabitoon

On July 22, an audio statement emerged **featuring the announcement of a new al-Qaeda affiliated group in Egypt**, led by Hisham al-Ashmawy. It was disseminated through al-Qaeda media channels and features a statement from al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri at the beginning. In the statement, Ashmawy is referred to as the leader of "al-Murabitoon." In the statement, Ashmawy references the glory of the Islamic umma (nation) and its accomplishments, specifically Burma, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and now Egypt. He calls on followers to sacrifice by fighting Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi and protecting Islam in Egypt. This was a rare direct reference to Sisi by name in a statement from a terror group or actor.

³ TIMEP's data includes only attacks carried out on Egyptian targets; however, Wilayat Sinai claimed to have attacked Jewish settlements in retaliation for Israel's alleged assistance to the Egyptian army during the July 1 assault.

⁴ This represents an incomplete summary of June activity, given the non-correspondence of the Hijri and Gregorian calendars. Activity occurring between July 18 and July 30 is extracted from unofficial WS media organs. When independent reports or security responses corroborate or conflict with these accounts, these are noted or included as reference links..

Terror Groups' Notable Developments:

Ashmawy, a **former Thunderbolt Special Forces officer in the Egyptian military**, was discharged for his radical views in 2007. Previously [referred](#) to as a suspect in the attempted assassination of Mohamed Ibrahim (September 2013) and Battalion 101 attack (January 2015), his name had [reemerged](#) in connection with the assassination of Prosecutor-General Hisham Barakat before the media gag was issued. [Officials have also implicated him in the bombing of the Italian consulate](#) and the summer 2014 attacks in Farafra in the western desert. The audio statement that was issued on July 22 does not offer any claim for the attacks that Ashmawy was supposedly tied to.

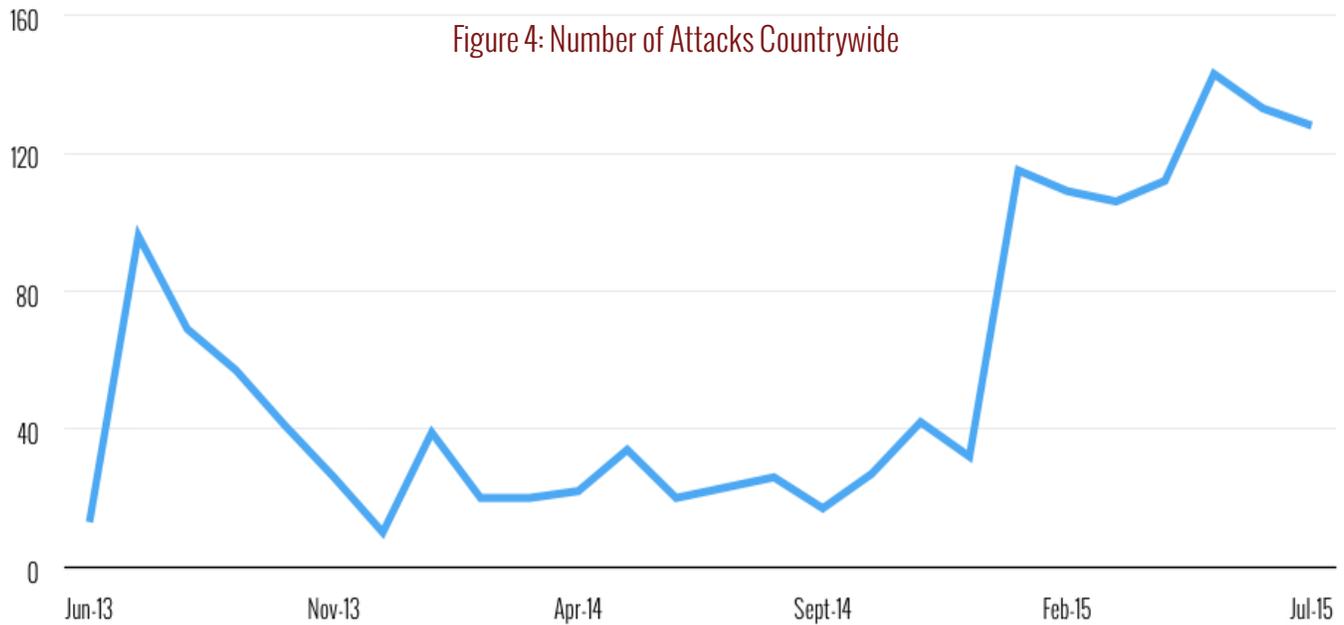
Ashmawy was alleged to have traveled to Syria in spring 2013, apparently having created a cell within Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. At this time (and until summer 2014) the group was closely aligned with al-Qaeda and Zawahiri before later pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State.⁵

On August 18, **the Islamic State issued a death warrant for Ashmawy**, whom they described as a “defector” and leader of al-Murabitoon. According to the Islamic State statement, he appeared in Derna, Libya in 2014 to form the new group, which, given the location from which it emerged, **may suggest ties with Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s group** of the same name.

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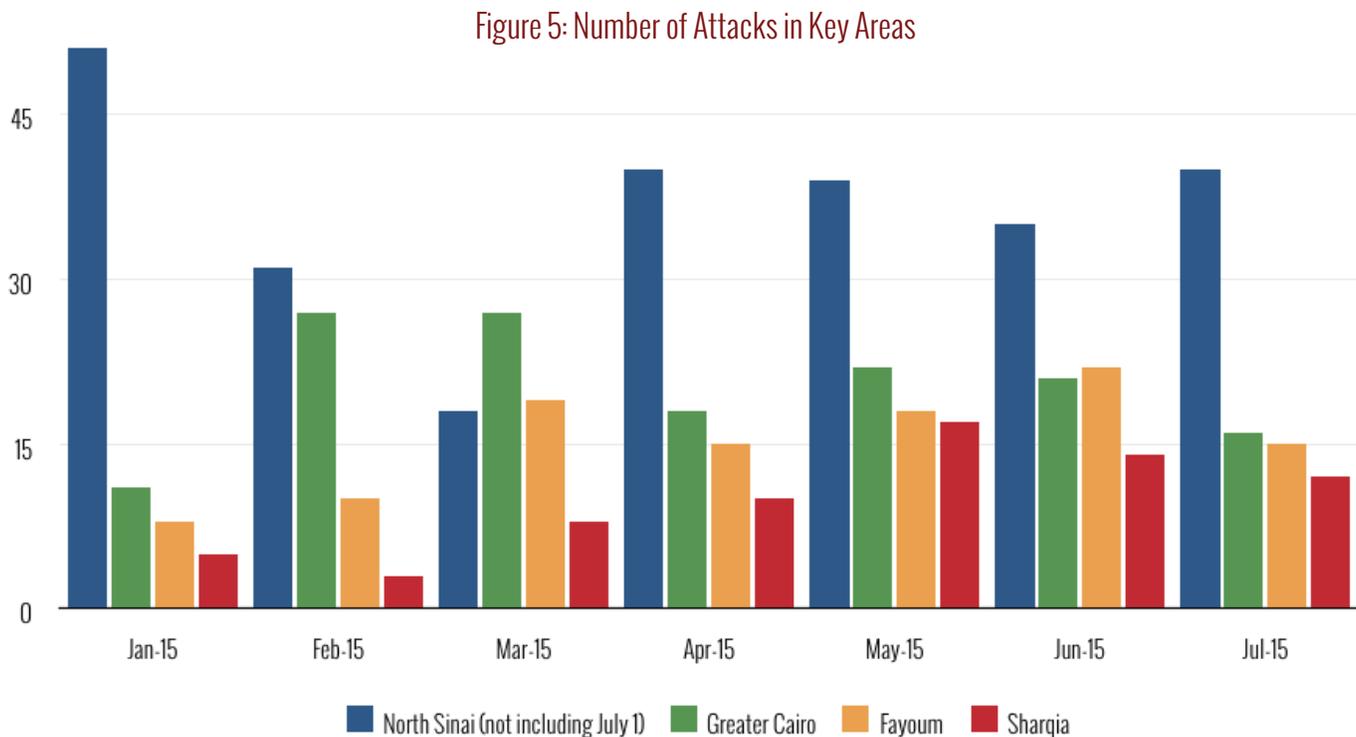
Terror Attacks Trend Report:

July saw 128 reported terror attacks, bringing the average number of reported attacks per month in 2015 to 120.7, compared with fewer than 30 per month in the two years prior (Figure 4).



Outside the July 1 coordinated attacks, North Sinai saw 40 reported terror attacks in July, still five more than the previous month. Taken with the July 1 offensive, **July 2015 was the most active month on record in terms of reported violent activity** in North Sinai.

In the Greater Cairo area, 16 attacks were reported (versus 21 in May); after Cairo and North Sinai, the provinces of Fayoum and Sharqia saw the greatest number of attacks, with 15 and 12, respectively (Figure 5).



Terror Attacks Trend Report:

With the high casualty rate of the July 1 attacks (this report adopts a figure of 22), the **overall number of those reported killed in July in Egypt rose from 31 in June to 48** in July. The number of civilians reported killed in attacks dropped however, with six civilians reported killed in attacks in June ([Figures 6 and 7](#)).

Figure 6: Number of Deaths in Attacks (by location)

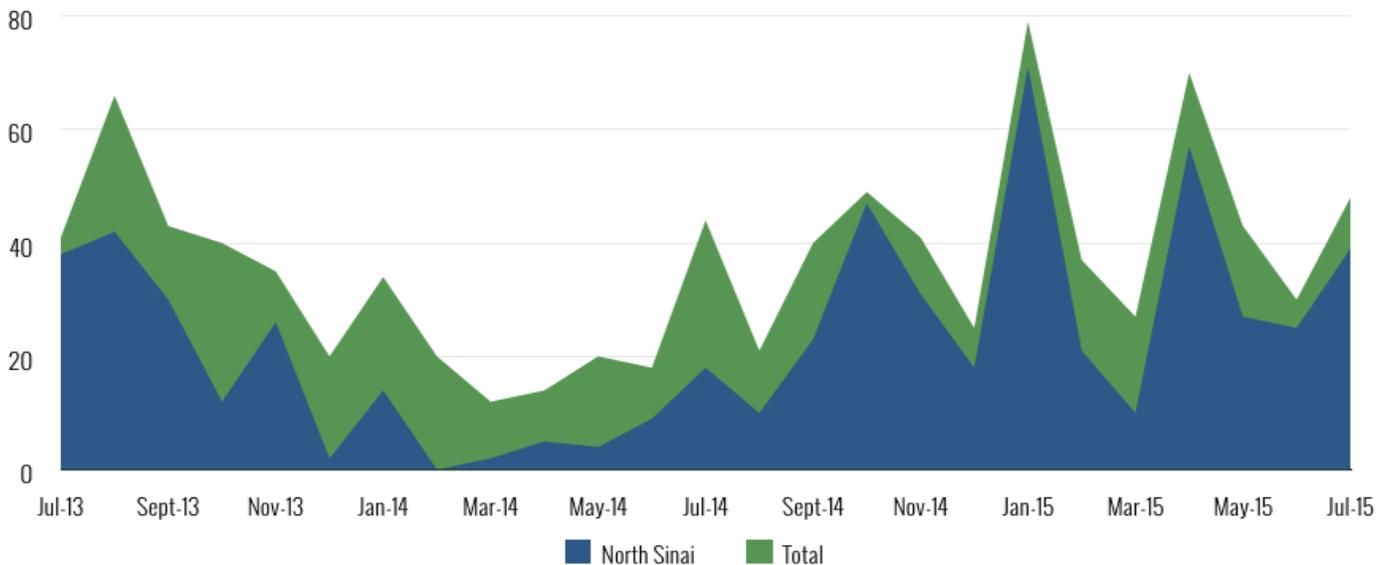
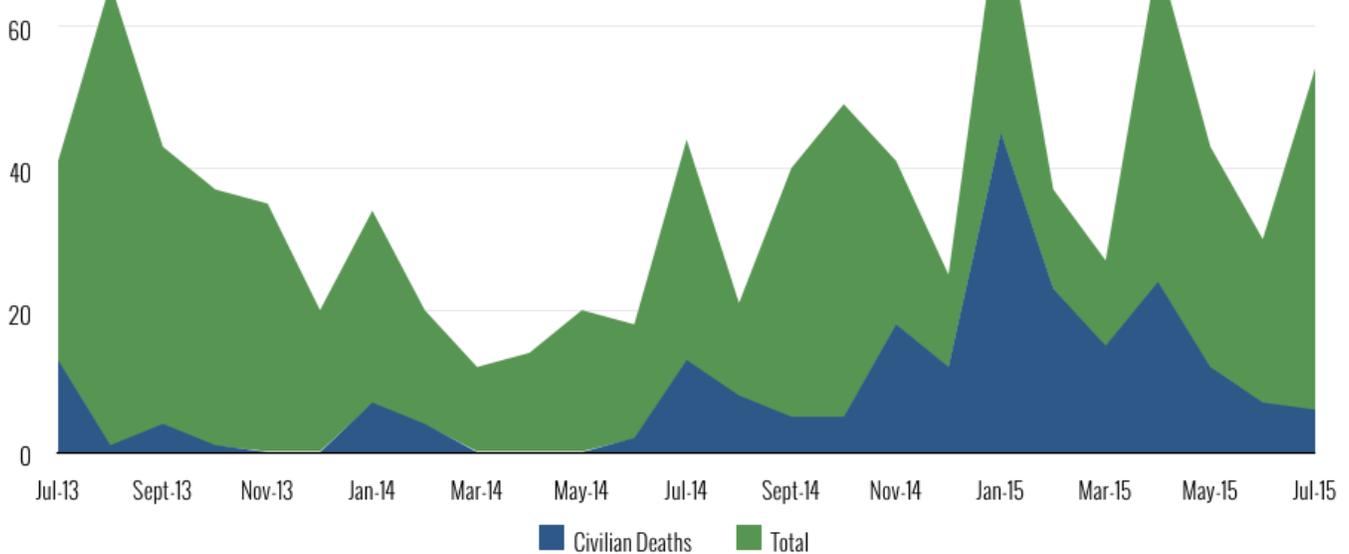


Figure 7: Number of Deaths in Attacks (by victim)



Terror Attacks Trend Report:

July saw a decrease in reported attacks on economic and property targets, from 35 in June to 23 in July ([Figure 2](#)). In July, these included reports of:

- one attack on a consulate;
- seven attacks on electricity infrastructure;
- one attack on a bank;
- one attack on a prison;
- two attacks on public restaurants (one of which was a KFC);
- five attacks on private property belonging to police or their alleged supporters;
- two attacks on courts; and
- one attack on a fuel tanker.

Security Sector Notable Developments:

On July 20, [Egypt received the first three](#) of **24 Dassault Rafale fighter jets** from France, as part of a \$5.6 billion arms deal that was signed in February.

At the scene of Ajnad Misr's July 16 bombing in Heliopolis, **Interior Minister [Magdy Abdel Ghaffar](#) fired Cairo's Security Director, Osama Bedier**. His firing came less than a week after the Islamic State's bombing of the Italian consulate. **[Major General Khaled Abdel Aal](#) was appointed** to be Bedier's replacement.

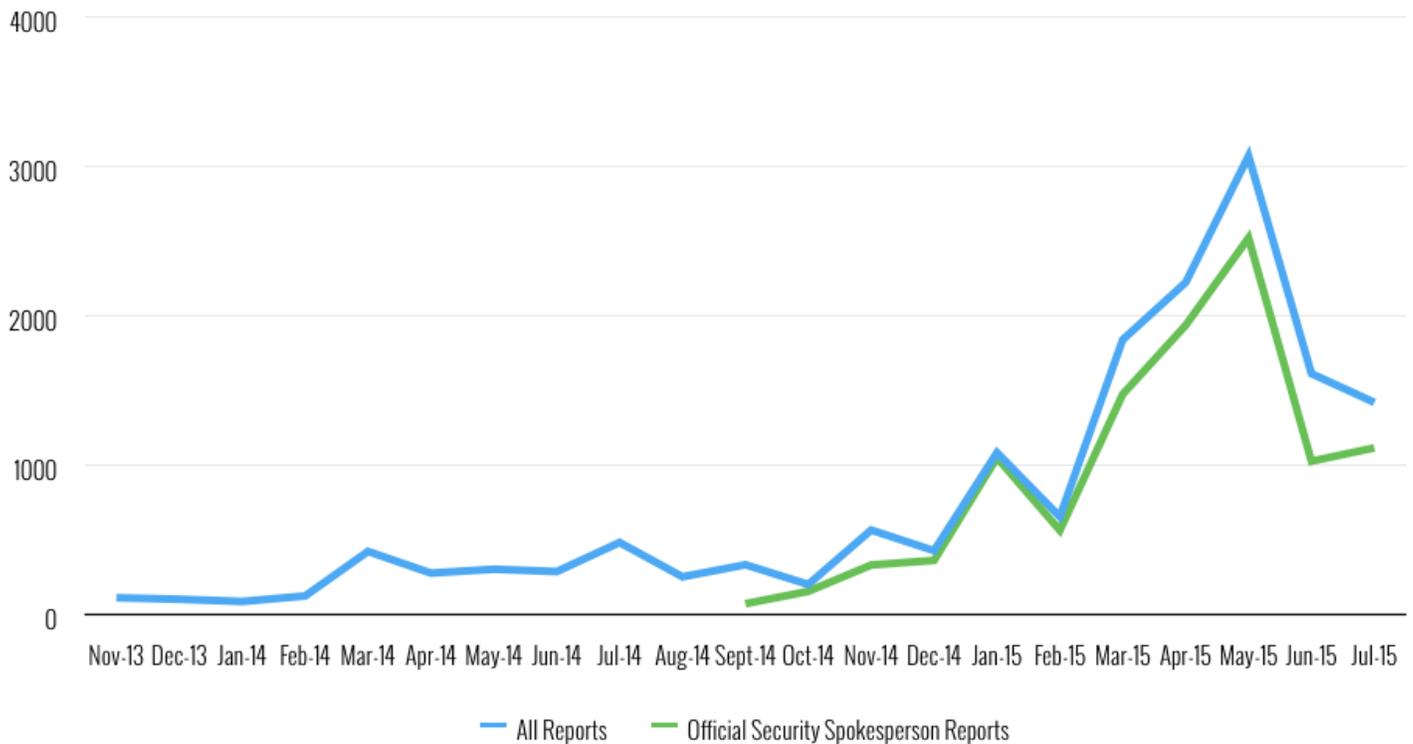
On July 22, **the Interior Minister approved a reshuffling in the ministry**, appointing 21 new deputy ministers and 24 new security directors. The move was undertaken as part of a [routine annual reshuffling](#) to replace those of retirement age.

Counter-terror Operations Trend Report:

July saw a decrease in reported counter-terror operations, from 260 in June to 190 in July, with some discrepancy between official state security reports and news media reports. Of the 190 reported counter-terror operations, **official state security spokespersons reported 126 distinct counter-terror operations**⁶ (Figure 3).

A reported **1,421 alleged terrorists were arrested** in April 2015 (1,117 based on official security spokespersons). Of these, **676 were alleged members of the Muslim Brotherhood** (534 based on official security spokespersons; see Figure 8 and 9)

Figure 8: Number of Arrests in Counter-Terror Operations Countrywide



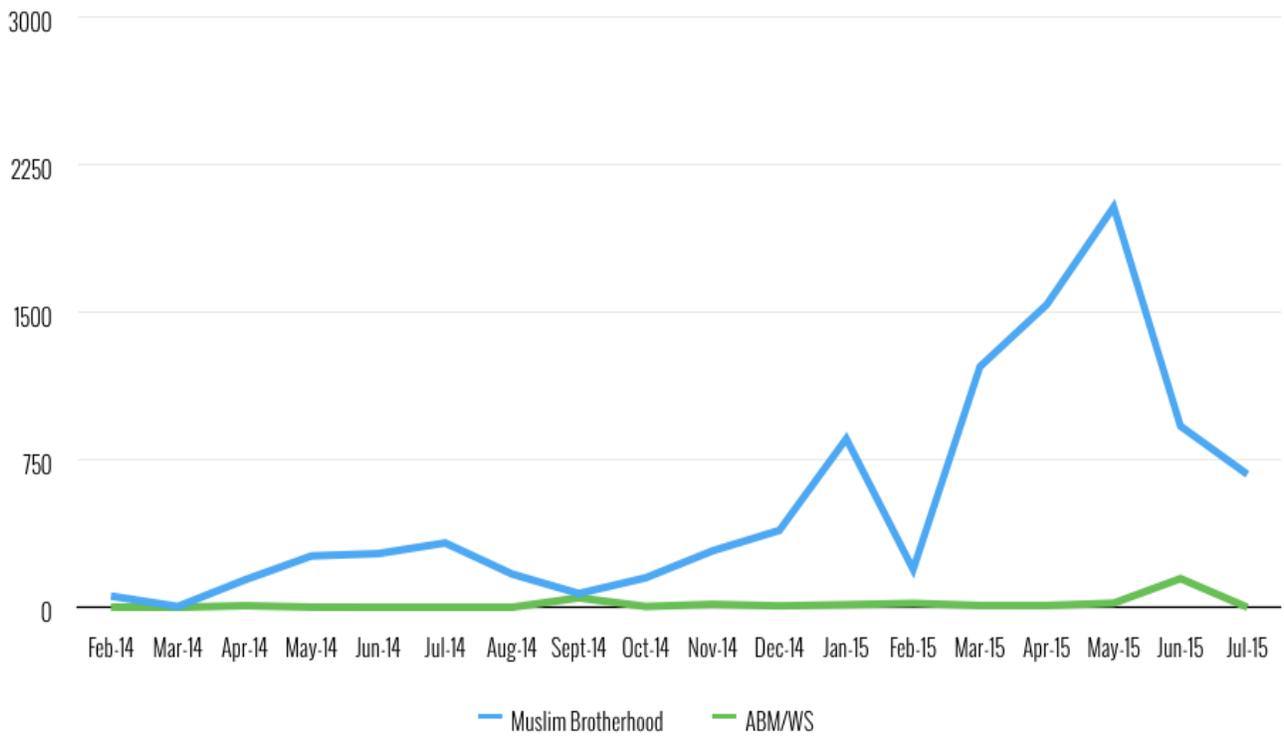
The **majority of reported counter-terror operations took place in North Sinai**, with 255 reported arrests. Three reported security operations took place in Cairo, where 29 were arrested; 12 took place in Giza, where 35 were reported arrested; and 46 individuals were reported arrested in six counter-terror operations in Gharbia.

An aggregate of news **media and official media reports indicated that 600 alleged terrorists were killed** in counter-terror operations; of these, official state media reported 369 deaths in counter-terror operations, bringing the yearly total to **1,066 alleged terrorists reported killed by state media in 2015**.

⁶ In order to account for double-posting information on operations, TIMEP reviews each official report and cross-checks with news media reporting.

Counter-terror Operations Trend Report:

Figure 9: Arrests by Alleged Affiliation



Assault in Sheikh Zuweid: A turning point in Egypt's fight against terrorism

On the morning of July 1, 2015, militants engaged in coordinated attacks throughout Egypt's North Sinai province. The attacks began just before 7 a.m. Cairo time, taking place at multiple checkpoints and other sites in the province, including a police officers club in the capital of Arish and sites throughout the city of Sheikh Zuweid (all sites of attacks are listed below). Islamic State affiliate Wilayat Sinai (formerly Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis) claimed the attacks in a series of statements, initially referencing "simultaneous martyrdom operations and attacks at more than 15 apostate army checkpoints," and following with statements on six other attacks, plus additional combat locations.

The attack marks the most significant assault by militants in Egypt in many years, and for the first time, militants from Wilayat Sinai were able to gain control, albeit temporarily, of an urban center when they stormed Sheikh Zuweid. The number and length of operations, along with the ability to overtake multiple military installments and a heavily secured city with over sixty thousand inhabitants, are unparalleled in Egypt's contemporary fight against terrorism.

By 12:40, militants declared that they had laid siege to the centrally located and heavily guarded police station in the city, which lies at the intersection of nearly one kilometer of closed roads, protected by checkpoints on the city's outskirts. Throughout the afternoon, reports emerged of militants patrolling the streets and occupying rooftops of residences. (In several accounts, militants executed Sheikh Zuweid residents who refused to grant entry into their homes.) According to militant statements, suicide bombers targeted the checkpoints, allowing for an armed takeover of the city's center and area south of there. In carrying out the attack, militants employed a range of weapons, deploying an arsenal of rocket-propelled grenades, Kornet anti-tank guided missiles, and mortars in coordination with roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that disrupted the military's ability to respond immediately.

The scale of the militants' operations—the amount and type of weapons used, the broad geographic area of the attacks, and the number of fighters that would have been required—indicates significant advanced planning and coordination. The July 1 operation was the largest since a January 29, 2015, attack on the Battalion 101 military camp and a number of checkpoints in the North Sinai capital of Arish. Statements from terrorist media accounts said the Battalion 101 attack involved around 100 fighters, indicating that yesterday's attack may have required a significant number more than that, given the increased number of checkpoints targeted and the militants' ability to have overpowered military and held Sheikh Zuweid, even for a short period of 12 hours. The attack also demonstrates militants' increasingly sophisticated organizational coordination into different units responsible for different locations and responsibilities (such as intelligence, security, and operations).

The Egyptian military responded with great force. In the early afternoon, F-16 aircraft launched strikes on locations in and around Sheikh Zuweid. In a televised statement, the military officially reported 17 members of its forces were killed throughout the day (although government officials had earlier reported at least 50 security deaths to *al-Ahram*). The statement also reported that the military had successfully killed more than 100 militants and destroyed 20 vehicles in its counterattack. Militants reported over 100 soldiers killed in the operations. Restriction of communications due to downed cellular and electricity networks and the outright ban on journalists working in North Sinai have impeded any estimates of civilians wounded or killed in the initial assault or subsequent military response.

After the commencement of airstrikes, militants retreated from their positions in the city, reportedly evacuating amid continued air fire. By 7:00 p.m., Twitter accounts affiliated with Wilayat Sinai had admitted their defeat, vowing that their "humiliation" would not be in vain. Despite their avowal to continue attacks, the ammunition deployed in yesterday's attack, combined with the blow to their numbers in the air assault, suggest that capacity to carry out large scale attacks may be severely hindered in the near future.

Counter-terror Operations Trend Report:

The attacks are indicative of the past nine months that have seen continuous escalation and heightened tension between militants and the military, particularly marked since an October 24, 2014, attack on soldiers at the Karm al-Qawadis checkpoint. The government’s creation of a buffer zone in Rafah, along the Gaza border, required the forced relocation of many residents. This evacuation, as well as airstrikes on militant strongholds (particularly in the Gaza border areas of Mehdiya and Moqataa), has led to increasing numbers of militant recruits.

The impact of the July 1 attack will remain to be seen in the upcoming days and months—not only in terms of the number of casualties, but also in terms of militants’ ability to operate. While militants expended significant weaponry throughout the day’s events, the extent of their caches remains unclear. After the fall of Libyan dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011, weapons flowed into Egypt through its porous western border. While these inflows have slowed significantly since mid-2013, several other factors may indicate large stores already in the country. The growing number of members and sympathizers are likely to join militant ranks with their own arsenals, given that the area is known for weapons ownership, and the militants have succeeded in capturing Egyptian military weaponry in attacks over the past months. Thus, while investigating and interrupting arms flows on the Western border is crucial to cut off terrorists’ resupply, it may not be enough to halt operations.

The real strength of Wilayat Sinai has come from their ability to exploit local frustrations with the military for their own violent means. In the Sheikh Zuweid attack, it was militants who were in the position of entering homes, forcing residents out, limiting their mobility, and causing civilian bloodshed. The placement of roadside bombs and militant attacks on ambulances attempting to enter the city prevented essential care from reaching civilians in desperate need. These factors now place militants in the position of antagonism toward civilian populations, a fact which has the potential to turn the tide of sympathy against them.

This situation provides an important moment for the Egyptian military to capitalize on an opportunity to engage with local populations to gather intelligence about militant operations. The inability to do so in the past has long been critiqued as a weakness that may have allowed for catastrophic attacks. Protecting civilians from militants without overreaching in the necessary efforts to root out and capture weapons supply could provide a turning point in the battle against insurgency in the Sinai.

Attack Locations:

Officers’ Club	Abidat checkpoint
Sadra checkpoint	Qabr Amir checkpoint
Abo Rifaii checkpoint	al Assaf checkpoint
al-Masura checkpoint	Bawaba checkpoint
Sadut checkpoint	Shilaq checkpoint
Wali Lafi checkpoint	Gorah checkpoint
Wifaq checkpoint	al-Zahir checkpoint
Abo Tawila checkpoint	Sa’id checkpoint
al-Dara’ib checkpoint	al-Manakh checkpoint
Sheikh Zuweid police station	Karm al Qwadas checkpoint
Girada checkpoint	Abu Gared checkpoint
Gas Station checkpoint (Kharuba)	al-Wahashi checkpoint
	al Alrish Airport

Methodology

Methodology

TIMEP engages in daily media monitoring to update its dataset as developments occur, tracking all English and Arabic language news reports of violence from state, private, and social media outlets.

At times, the project relies on statements and media published on the accounts of terror actors themselves. Access to these statements was obtained through monitoring of jihadi web forums and terror groups' social media pages.

TIMEP additionally independently monitors all statements on Egyptian Ministry of Interior and the Egyptian military spokesperson's social media accounts, where both institutions publish a record of their public activities.

In determining which events to record, the project tracks only those events which could reasonably be considered acts of "terrorism" or the state's proclaimed response to such acts. Yet, "terrorism" and "terrorist" are themselves heavily contested terms.

Thus, in order to capture the current threat faced by Egypt, this project adopts a definition of "terror attack" as one that entails premeditated violence enacted for political ends. This does not include the threat of attack, but rather only enacted violence. Political ends may be defined as any which have a reasonable bearing on changing an established power dynamic. For this reason, premeditated targeting of religious institutions where it could be reasonably assumed that these were targeted in their political nature are included; however, religious institutions or religious minority civilians targeted as a result of local conflict are not included.

Likewise, "counter-terror operation" is ill-defined, particularly as many government actions (particularly in the legal arena) have been lately construed as part of a larger "war on terror." For the purposes of this project, only security actions taken to combat declared terrorist groups have been considered "counter-terror efforts." (This includes the Muslim Brotherhood only after their designation as a terrorist group.) This definition does not include judicial action.

Each act of terror or counter-terror operation is recorded, capturing the date of the attack, a brief description, the closest determinable coordinates, the province in which the attack or operation was carried out, the type of attack or operation, any casualties (or arrests in the case of counter-terror operations), and the targets. In the case of terror attacks, the perpetrator is designated where one was claimed, or, in the instance of a suspected perpetrator, this information was also recorded. The dataset represents the most comprehensive available, capturing all reported acts of terror or counter-terror operations as they occur.

TIMEP began independent data collection in March 2014; any events documented before this time were documented based on data provided by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED). Using ACLED data, TIMEP extracted a dataset unique to reference terror violence in Egypt. Accessing newswire reports or government statements corresponding to each individual event, TIMEP cross-referenced every data entry from ACLED before recording it in the TIMEP dataset.

Using TIMEP's unique data, monthly reports offers a quantitative analysis of trends in attacks and operations. The analysis is both diachronic and synchronic, in keeping with the goal of offering a holistic picture of the dynamic nature of Egypt's state of security.