



The Tahrir Institute
for Middle East Policy



EGYPT

SECURITY WATCH

QUARTERLY REPORT: JANUARY - MARCH 2016

THE TAHRIR INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization, is dedicated to understanding and supporting Middle Eastern countries undergoing democratic transitions and committed to informing international policymakers and the public of developments in these countries.

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INTRODUCTION

The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy's *Egypt Security Watch* explores the nature of the security threat that Egypt faces, providing insight and analysis on the state's response to this threat. The project is dynamic, responding to the changing contours of the situation on the ground and to the needs of its audience. This second quarterly report covers the period of January 2016 to March 2016.

The quarterly reports include an elaboration of trends in terror attacks and counter-terror operations, cover important developments in Egypt's security sector, and provide analysis of contextual developments, drawing on the breadth of TIMEP's institutional knowledge. This format not only provides information on trends, but will offer a richer understanding of Egypt's overall security situation and its trajectory.

Our quarterly reports feature three sections:

- *Terrorism*: With information detailing notable attacks, terror group developments, and trends, this section provides a picture of the threat posed to Egypt from actors seeking to use political violence to create a climate of fear in the country.
- *Counter-terrorism*: Mirroring the previous one, this section will focus on the state's stated efforts to combat terrorists (as it defines them), detailing notable operations, developments within the security sector, and trends.
- *Legal and Political Context*: This section explores the larger political and legal contexts in which the state carries out its declared "war on terror," examining relevant juridical developments, legislation, and political actions and discourses.

As with all of our work at TIMEP, we are committed to furthering policies toward the region that both foster safety and security for its citizens, while recognizing that these must be based on a sincere and comprehensive respect for human rights and the rule of law. We hope that these reports will contribute to a sound understanding of the security situation necessary to inform this policy approach.

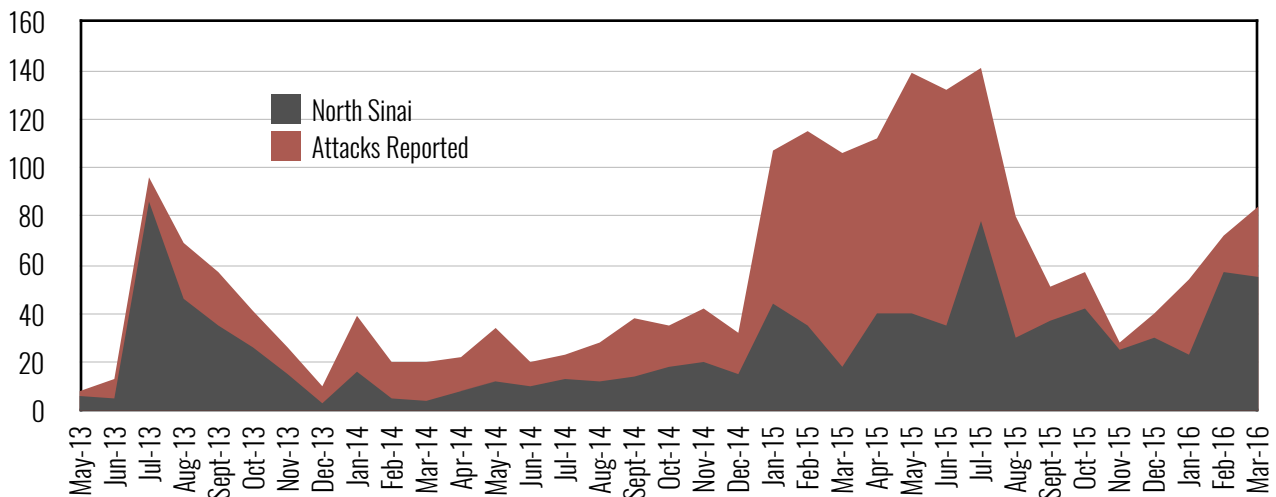
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first quarter of 2016 saw the continuation of conflict in North Sinai, with an increase of reported Islamic State activity in the province, as well as the continuation of military campaigns. While attacks generally remained at a lower rate than their height a year ago (which was around 90 attacks per month), the resurgence of the Popular Resistance Movement contributed to an increase in activity overall from the previous quarter. Given the enduring turmoil in the region, both domestic and international policymakers made public their staunch support of Egypt’s domestic counter-terrorism efforts throughout the quarter.

TERRORISM

- After several months in which reports of attacks decreased, **reports of attacks were on the rise** again from January to March 2016, with **210 attacks reported overall**. The monthly rate thus far for 2016 is 70 attacks reported per month, compared to 90 in 2015, and under 30 in 2014 and 2013.
- Following a hiatus in reported activity, **the Popular Resistance Movement resurfaced, claiming attacks on a new Facebook page**. While the group had initially avoided overt reference to Islam, favoring language that extolled the valor of carrying on the revolution, **this iteration showcases a new slogan—“God, Martyrs, Revolution”—and many of the posts lead with Quranic verses**. The group has maintained its *modus operandi*, with a combination of terror attacks (mostly arson and improvised explosive devices) and spontaneous efforts to thwart security efforts (like with road blockages).
- Attacks were also reported to have increased in North Sinai, where the Islamic State’s Wilayat Sinai (Sinai Province) continued to carry out its insurgency. **Nearly two-thirds of the overall attacks in the first quarter of 2016 were reported in the sparsely populated province, amounting to 118 attacks**, or an average of roughly 1.5 attacks per day. Of these, Wilayat Sinai claimed the targeted execution of 12 individuals over the quarter.

Attacks Reported

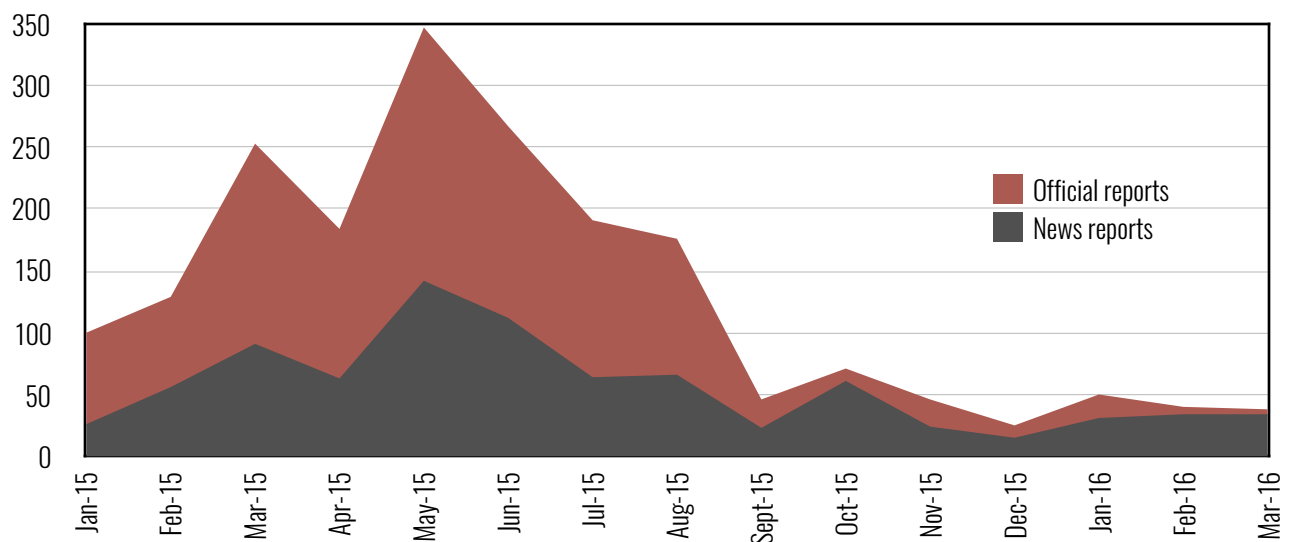


- Taking advantage of the media blackout in North Sinai, **Wilayat Sinai ramped up media promotion of its “governance” efforts**, trumpeting its continued crackdown on activities not in compliance with Islamic law and carrying out retributive attacks for security forces’ [mistreatment of women](#) to promote its role as “protector.”
- Although the group does not control land as its regional counterparts do, **Wilayat Sinai expanded its geographical reach in the first quarter of 2016**, carrying out attacks in the western and central parts of the peninsula, as well as its usual area of activity in the northeast.
- **A January 21 attack in Giza that resulted in the deaths of at least seven security personnel was claimed by both the Islamic State in Egypt and Revolutionary Punishment.** The attack took place when security personnel arrived at an apartment in the Haram district in a security operation. Given the dual claim, it is not clear which group carried out the attack or the degree to which the two are interlinked.
- Only 23 attacks were reported on property or economic targets from January to March 2016, a significant decrease from the wave of such attacks that reached its height with 56 attacks on economic targets in May 2015.

COUNTER-TERRORISM

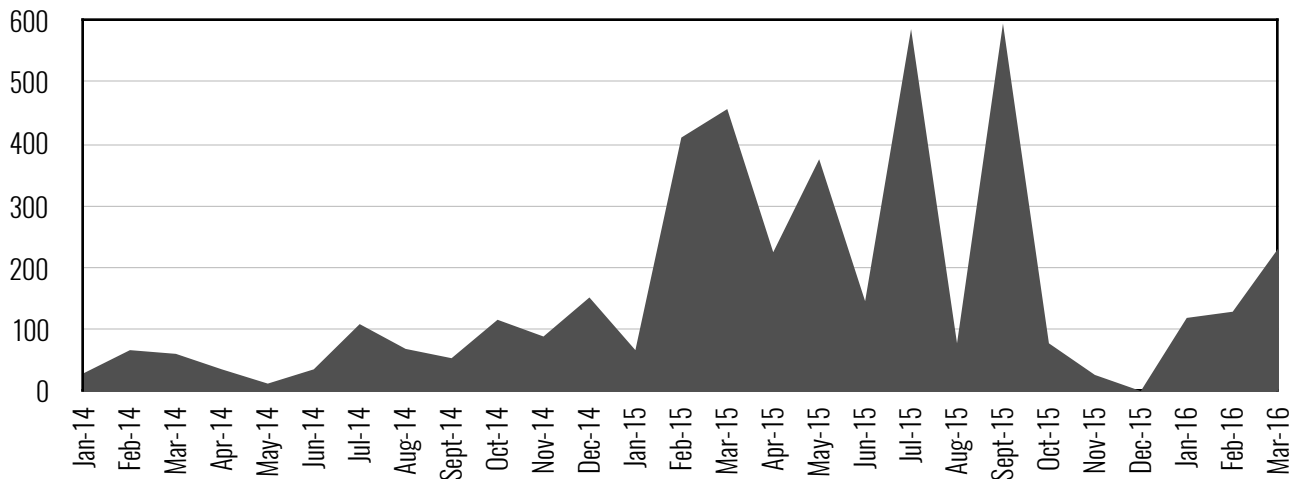
- Reports of counter-terror operations continued at a slower pace in the first quarter of 2016, with 128 counter-terror operations reported over the three months (compared to 152 per month throughout 2015). Very few of these were reported on official state media. **This suggests that the Ministry of Interior has either effectively ceased its terrorism-related arrests or has ceased to publicly report them.**
- Corresponding to this trend, **counter-terror operations against the Muslim Brotherhood appear to have eased**; 78 alleged members of the terrorist-designated Muslim Brotherhood were arrested from January to March 2016. Over 12,000 individuals have been arrested on terror charges relating to their membership in the group since it was declared a domestic terror organization.

Counter-Terror Operations Reported



- While overall reports of operations were fewer than in previous quarters, **the number of deaths reported in counter-terror operations saw a steady climb over the first three months of 2016.** This was due to the continuation of the “Martyr’s Right” military campaign in North Sinai, which entered into its third phase. **Thus far, all three phases have featured aerial bombardment and ground operations** designed to “rid” the province of terrorists; it is unclear what distinguishes each phase.

Reported Deaths of Alleged Terrorists (Egypt Overall)



- On March 7, the Ministry of Interior announced that it had apprehended the perpetrators of Prosecutor-General Hisham Barakat’s assassination, one of Egypt’s highest profile attacks in years, which had occurred nine months earlier. **The ministry arrested 14 individuals associated with the attack and released video-recorded confessions in which the culprits described the involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Both groups denied the allegations and the ministry has provided no further evidence to support the confessions.** The ministry welcomed a Hamas delegation shortly thereafter.
- After months of nearby insurgent activity, the **Multinational Force and Observers closed its northernmost outposts in North Sinai,** and U.S. officials hinted at force reduction.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

- Egypt’s new parliament reviewed and approved all security-related legislation that had been issued by executive decree under President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi prior to the parliament’s election. This included the **controversial anti-terror law, which was passed overwhelmingly; only 24 of the 596 members of parliament voted against it.** The law includes provisions for special courts, limits reporting on terrorism, and protects law enforcement from legal ramifications in terrorism-related activity.
- **The handling of terrorism cases continued to raise concerns about detainee rights and the right to due process.** In January the “fast-tracking” of national security cases to Egypt’s military courts resulted in a four-year-old child being sentenced to life in prison.
- Despite human rights concerns, fears over regional turmoil (particularly security deterioration in neighboring Libya and the enduring violence in Syria) have inspired great international support for Egypt’s domestic security efforts. Over the course of the first quarter, several high-level global leaders, including CIA Director John Brennan and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, visited Cairo and pledged their commitment to Egypt’s counter-terror efforts.

TERRORISM

TRENDS

The following section showcases trends in reported violence throughout Egypt.

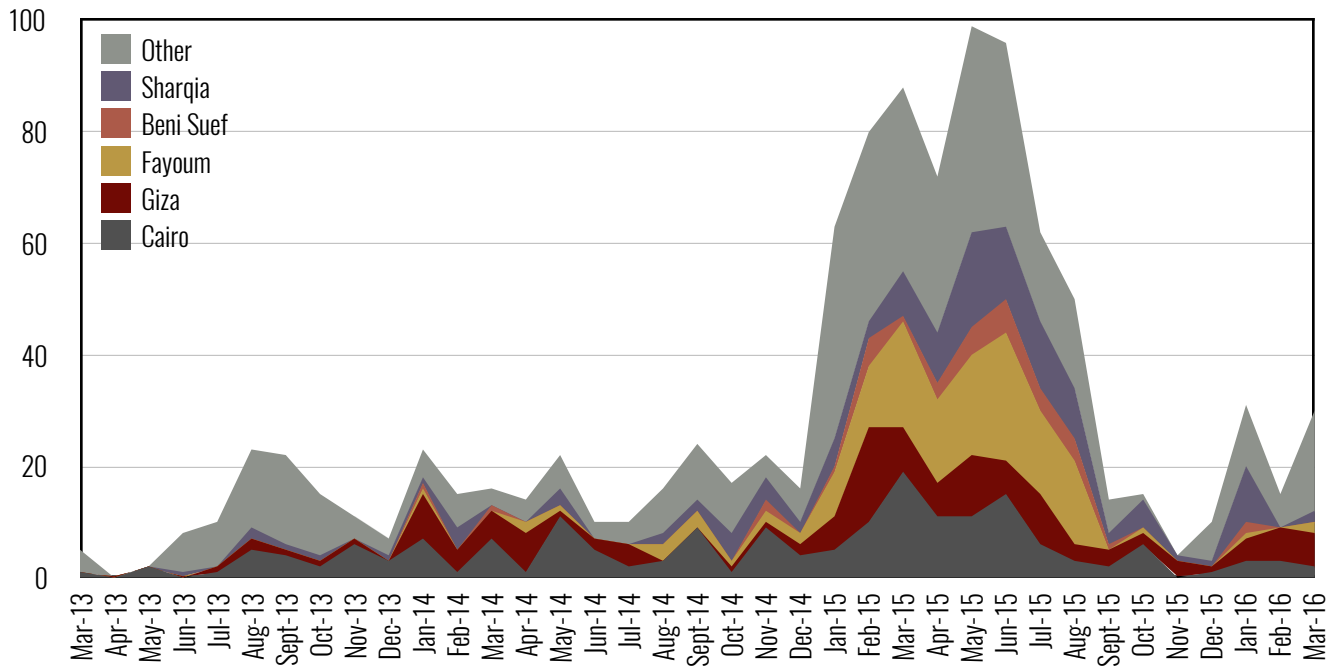
Reports of attacks steadily climb in early 2016

After a significant decrease in the rate of attacks reported in the fourth quarter of 2015, from over 80 per month in the first three quarters of 2015 to around 40 per month from September to December 2015, the first three months of 2016 saw an overall increase and a steady climb. Fifty-four attacks were reported in January, 72 in February, and 84 in March. While the monthly average of reported attacks in 2016 is, thus far, 22% lower than it was throughout 2015, it remains 137% higher than 2014 and 151% higher than 2013 (when most attacks took place in the latter half of the year).

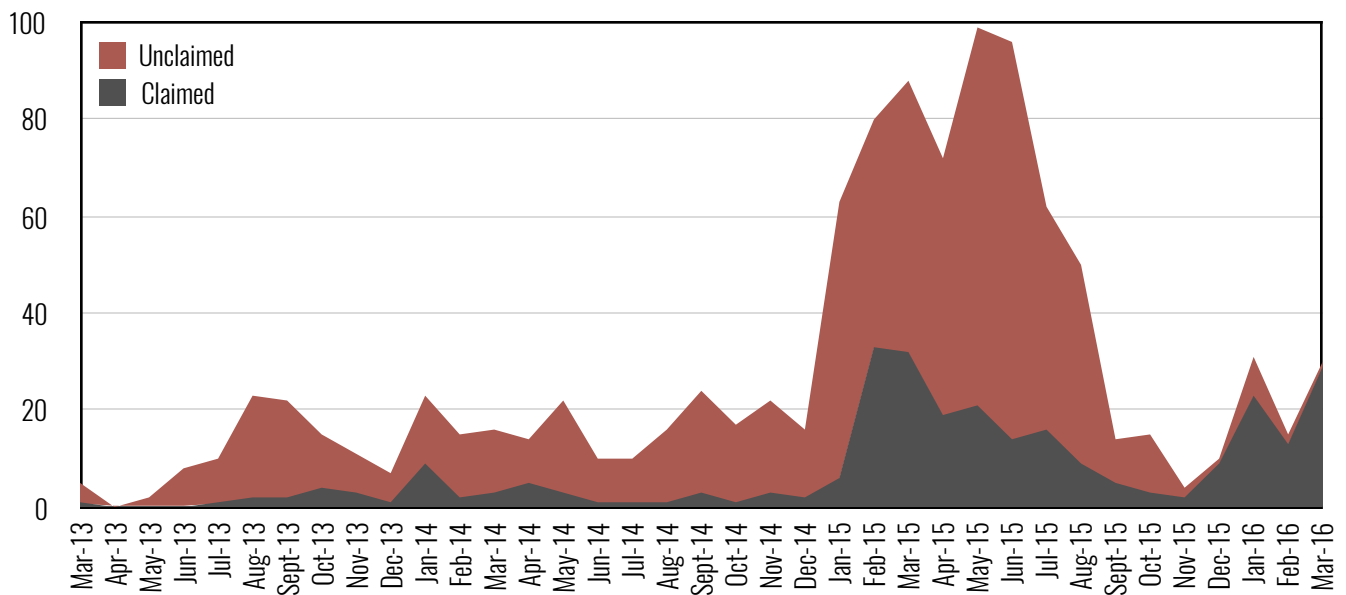
The pattern of reported attacks represented a sharp break from trends in late 2015, when attacks reported outside of North Sinai saw an intense drop. This eruption of reported attacks was largely due to the resurfacing of the Popular Resistance Movement, which had regularly claimed attacks outside North Sinai in late 2014 and throughout 2015. Though the group only minimally reported attacks in late 2015 (see [Quarterly Report](#) Oct-Dec 2015, page 10), they resumed activity in the lead up to the fifth anniversary of the January 25 Revolution (see more in the subsequent section on Terror Groups Developments).

Number of Attacks Reported (outside North Sinai)	
2013	
Qtr1	11
Qtr2	10
Qtr3	55
Qtr4	33
2014	
Qtr1	54
Qtr2	46
Qtr3	50
Qtr4	55
2015	
Qtr1	231
Qtr2	267
Qtr3	126
Qtr4	29
2016	
Qtr1	76

Attacks Reported (outside of North Sinai)

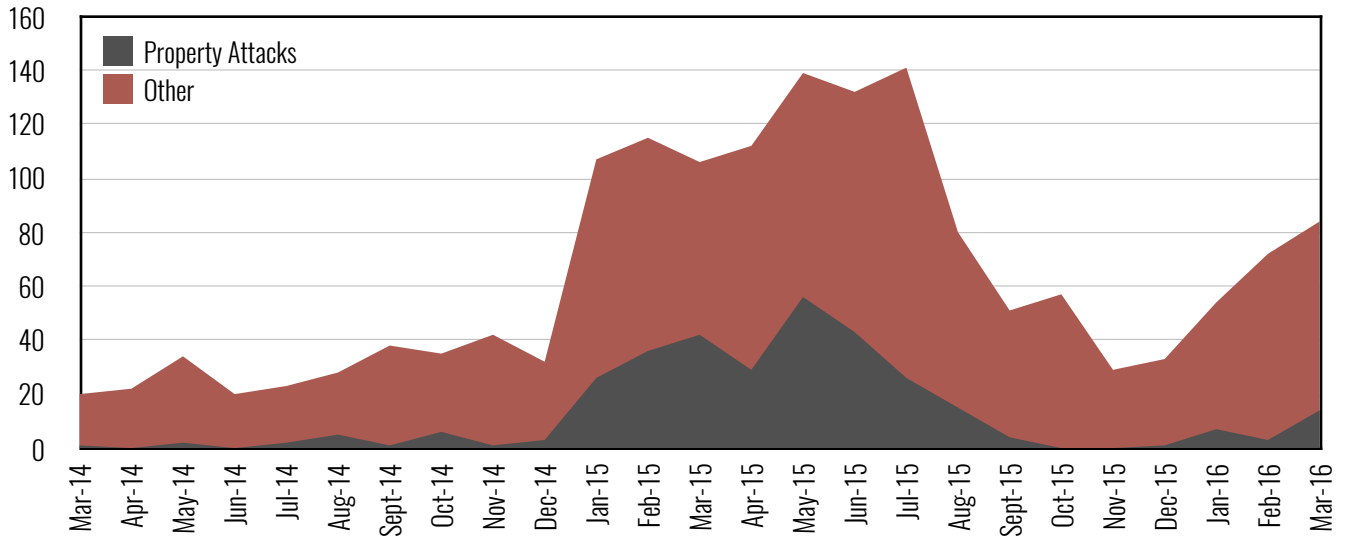


Attacks Reported (outside of North Sinai)



Similarly, after a brief frenzy of attacks on property and economic targets like banks and other multinational corporations was reported in early 2015 ([273 such reports from January to August](#)), these have diminished significantly. Only 23 attacks took place on property from January to March 2016; 17 of these were arson, as the Popular Resistance Movement resumed its attacks on transportation, power infrastructure, and private property.

Attacks Reported on Property

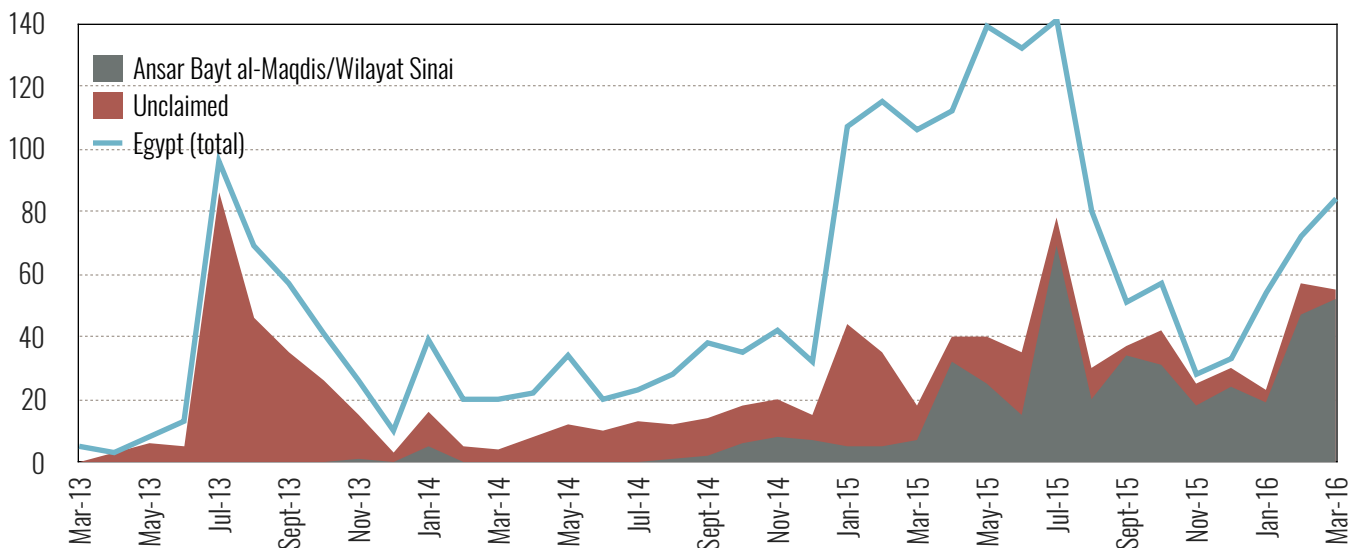


Reports of attacks increase in North Sinai

The uptick in attacks reported in early 2016 is due in part to the continued high rate of attacks reported from North Sinai. Of all reports of attacks in Egypt from January to March 2016, 64% of those were reported in North Sinai.

As prior reports have mentioned, independent reporting is effectively prohibited from the northern part of peninsula (with the exception of [rare and courageous efforts](#)), reports of attack details (particularly casualties) are next to impossible to corroborate. A great deal of information on specific activities occurring in North Sinai thus relies almost primarily on Islamic State disseminated media or Egyptian military statements, which often provide contrasting accounts. Of the 135 attacks reported in North Sinai, 45 of these were reported solely from Wilayat Sinai-affiliated media sources, disseminated through social media or messaging applications.

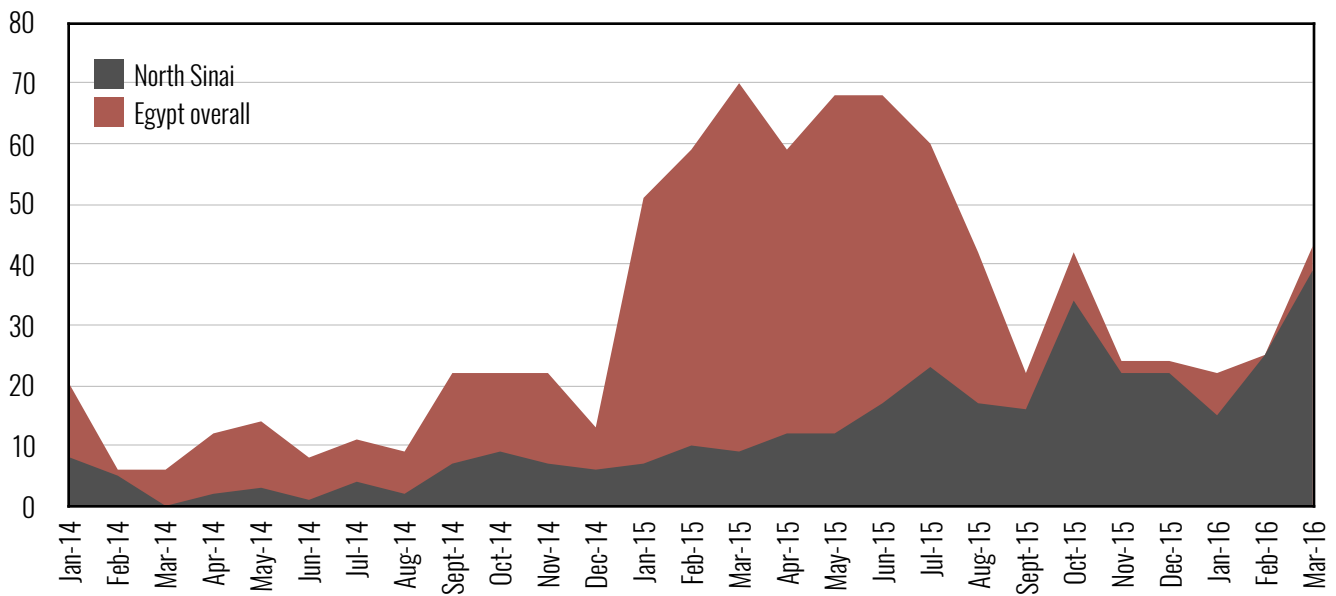
Attacks Reported (North Sinai)



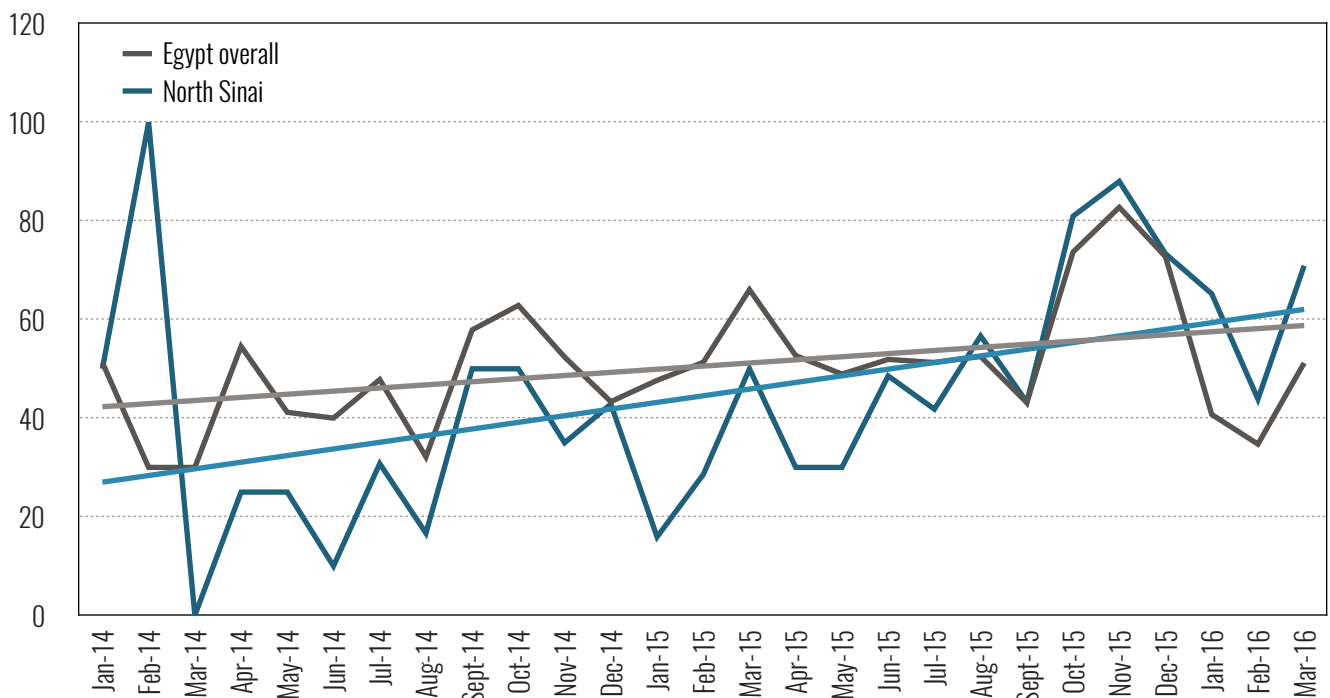
IED attacks reported at increasing rate

The prolonged insurgency in Sinai has contributed not only to a steady increase in the number of attacks reported there, but has also given rise to new trends in tactics and types of attacks. As noted in previous reports, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) began to be more widely used in 2014, with a plurality of reported attacks during the period of attacks in early- and mid-2015 using IEDs. In the first quarter of 2016, reports of IED attacks rose not only in number but in percentage of overall attacks, particularly due to their heavy use in North Sinai.

IED Attacks Reported



IED Attacks Reported (as % of overall attacks)

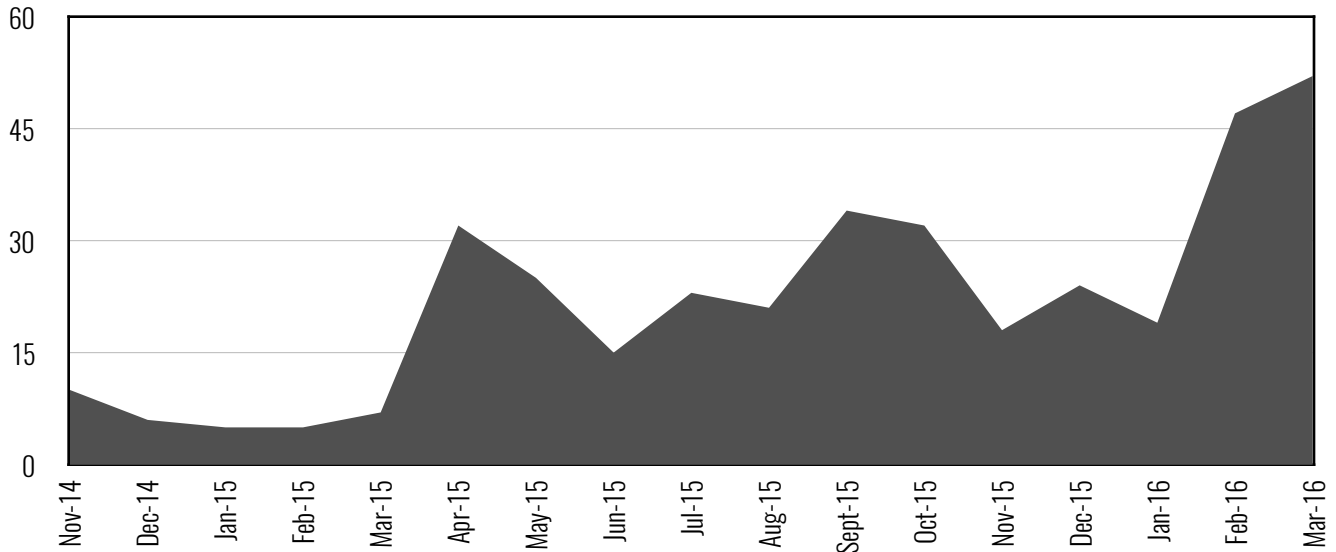


NOTABLE ATTACKS

The following section highlights notable terror attacks.

Islamic State ([Wilayat Sinai](#)) claims most active months yet in Sinai

Attacks Claimed by WS



In the first quarter of 2016, Wilayat Sinai claimed 118 attacks in the North Sinai province. This is the greatest number of attacks claimed in any quarter, even since before their announcement of allegiance to the Islamic State, when they were operating as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis.

Wilayat Sinai claimed 74 IED attacks, in which 75 deaths were reported. All of those reported killed were security personnel, except for one ambulance driver who was killed in an IED attack on March 6, 2016. Other attacks included Grad rockets, Katyusha rockets, a mortar, and small arms.

Other notable attack claims included:

- On *Saturday, March 19*, Wilayat Sinai claimed an attack on Safa police checkpoint in Arish, North Sinai, killing at least 15 members of the Egyptian police. The assault was framed as a response to local security forces' disrespectful treatment of women at security checkpoints, perpetuating Wilayat Sinai's efforts to establish themselves as a legitimate governor in a region where the Egyptian state struggles to establish its authority (see more in subsequent section on Terror Groups Developments).

According to the claim, which was disseminated through the Islamic State's official media channels, the militants initiated the attack using a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED), and then stormed the checkpoint with a barrage of gunfire. The attackers opened fire on emergency medical personnel as they tried to reach the checkpoint. The militants claimed to have seized a number of weapons and munitions, releasing images of these articles a day later. At least 15 policemen—including two captains, a first lieutenant, and 12 conscripts—were killed or went missing in the attack; the number of injured was not immediately clear. (One of the missing men was beheaded on March 31.)

- Wilayat Sinai claimed the targeted execution of 12 individuals over the quarter; six of these were beheaded and six were shot at close range. Of these, 10 were killed specifically for their alleged involvement with the Egyptian military as "spies;" no specific reason was given for the others.

- On *January 4*, Wilayat Sinai claimed an anti-aircraft attack against a rotary-wing aircraft. Although the claim provided photographs of the helicopter, it did not show any evidence the attack was successful; no other reports corroborated the claim.
- Wilayat Sinai claimed two attacks specifically on ambulances in North Sinai.
- Although not formally claimed by the Wilayat Sinai, on *March 14*, unidentified assailants opened fire on IDF troops across the Israeli border.

Giza attack claimed by both Revolutionary Punishment and Islamic State

On, *January 21*, Giza security forces, acting on intelligence gathered during a previous security raid, [stormed](#) an apartment in the Haram district of Giza, reportedly looking for a [link](#) in the Islamic State's IED production chain in Egypt. The apartments' occupants preemptively detonated a number of explosives upon entry of security personnel, resulting in the deaths of at least seven members of the security team and injuries to others, including civilians (there are conflicting reports as to whether the perpetrators died in the attack). The Islamic State's division in mainland Egypt, referred to in official Islamic State media as "Misr" (Egypt), claimed the incident via official Islamic State media channels.

This is one of a series of attacks that the mysterious Giza-based splinter has carried out over the last nine months. Relatively little is known about the organization, given its absence from social media sites like Twitter. Since its [first](#) known operation against the Italian Consulate in downtown Cairo—an attack which, according to the Islamic State's account, involved a half-ton of explosives delivered by vehicle—the Giza cell has claimed an additional 12 attacks. These notably include an [attack](#) on tourists at the Three Pyramids Hotel in January and an IED [attack](#) near the Omani Cultural Attaché in early March. While the relationship between the Giza-based cell and the Islamic State's official "province" in Sinai, Wilayat Sinai, remains unclear, the group appears to be a new incarnation of one of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis' (ABM) planned regional cells, possibly incorporating other actors as well. Ashraf Gharably, whom security forces [killed](#) in November 2015 during a botched arrest, headed ABM's Giza branch, and he appears to have also been commanding its successor at the time of his death. Whether or to what extent the mainland and Sinai branches of the Islamic State communicate or cooperate operationally or logistically is unclear.

Interestingly, another group [claimed](#) responsibility for the January incident as well. Revolutionary Punishment, which had largely been off the grid since September 2015, claimed responsibility for the Haram attack the next day, yet it failed to mention either the Islamic State or the Giza Cell in its claim. Since neither group refuted (nor confirmed) the claim of the other, it is possible that there was some level of coordination between the groups, though this is speculative.

Hurghada attack highlights "lone wolf" phenomenon in Egypt

On January 8, two young men stormed the Bella Vista hotel in the popular resort town of Hurghada, [stabbing two tourists there and threatening to "blow up" others](#). Security forces killed one of the assailants and wounded the other, and it was discovered that the attacker's "suicide vest" was a fake.

News reporting on the attack was conflicted: Some accounts suggested that a dispute between two "youths" escalated to a gunfight that injured tourists. Another account—namely, that made by the Red Sea governor, as reported by *Yum7*—claimed it was an attempted robbery. Claims that the men were carrying black "ISIS flags" were ascribed to an unnamed security source. For its part, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement that did not categorize the attack as terrorism. Reuters reported that the assailants "arrive[d] by sea," although the source did not specify the exact means. Ahram Online said that security forces had "foiled the attack," killing two of the gunmen.

No group claimed the attack, although later accounts detailed the young men's connections to the Islamic State, having contacted an Egyptian fighter with the group to express their desire to carry out the attack in the name of the organization (see Mokhtar Awad, "[Egypt's New Radicalism](#)"). The attack highlights the phenomenon of lone wolf attacks, which the Islamic State has recently encouraged, as one that is not unique to Western contexts. This case presents an instance where although Islamic State *wilayaat* or other affiliates exist, individuals that may not be able to make successful connections or be properly vetted may still carry out such lone wolf attacks.

Details murky in attack on tourists in Giza

On *January 8*, the Islamic State's affiliate in mainland Egypt [claimed](#) an attack that had occurred the day before at the Three Pyramids Hotel in Giza. The [attack](#), which was directed at a group of [police](#) officers near the hotel and at a parked bus loaded with [Arab-Israeli](#) tourists, reportedly began after 15 individuals—supposedly members of the Muslim Brotherhood—made their way to the hotel from a nearby protest, when the group began lobbing what were described as fireworks at the security personnel. Although the details of the attack are far from clear, it appears that, at some point, two assailants on a motorcycle (conflicting reports say a [microbus](#)) passed by and opened fire on the bus. The *Telegraph*, citing a spokesman from the Egyptian Security Information Center, [reported](#) that the assailants were using a pellet gun, which is generally considered non-lethal. Either [one](#) or [five](#) individuals were subsequently arrested, but whether any of them were connected to the Islamic State is unclear.

TERROR GROUPS DEVELOPMENTS

The following section details notable developments in the actor landscape, particularly known terror groups.

Wilayat Sinai's strategy sees shifts in first quarter, controlling territory and narrative of governance

Wilayat Sinai's geographical presence expanded in the past quarter. On February 28, the group claimed for the first time an attack on security personnel in North Sinai's Bir al-Abed, an area about 50 miles west of provincial capital and militant hotbed Arish, following it up with a separate [attack](#) only a few days later. Its operations in central Sinai—specifically Khariza, al-Qasima, and the areas around al-Hasna, a small city approximately 50 miles *south* of Arish—have likewise resurfaced after a long period of relative quiet. The group's IED activity in the area east of Arish has greatly undermined military counter-insurgency ground operations; taking advantage of this environment, Wilayat Sinai has reportedly erected makeshift security checkpoints in different parts of Rafah.

The organization has capitalized on negative sentiment toward the government by redoubling its efforts to portray itself as an alternative authority. Using what its followers refer to as Islamic Police and Hisba (public morality police), Wilayat Sinai has heavily promoted its continued crackdown on cigarettes, drugs, and other activities not in compliance with Islamic law. On February 23, for example, the group [claimed](#) to have seized 44 kilograms of heroin near the home of a spy. These and other infractions are dealt with ruthlessly, and described with language that reflects traditional notions of governance—*arresting* lawbreakers and *adjudicating* their crimes.

The framing of the March 19 attack as retribution for mistreatment of Sinai women demonstrates the group's efforts to establish their own legitimacy as "protecting" rather than "harming" Sinai residents. This is not the first time that women have featured prominently in Wilayat Sinai's propaganda. Following the [abduction](#) of Croatian expatriate Tomislav Salopek last summer, his captors demanded that the Egyptian government free all imprisoned women within 48 hours to guarantee Salopek's release; they decapitated him days later.

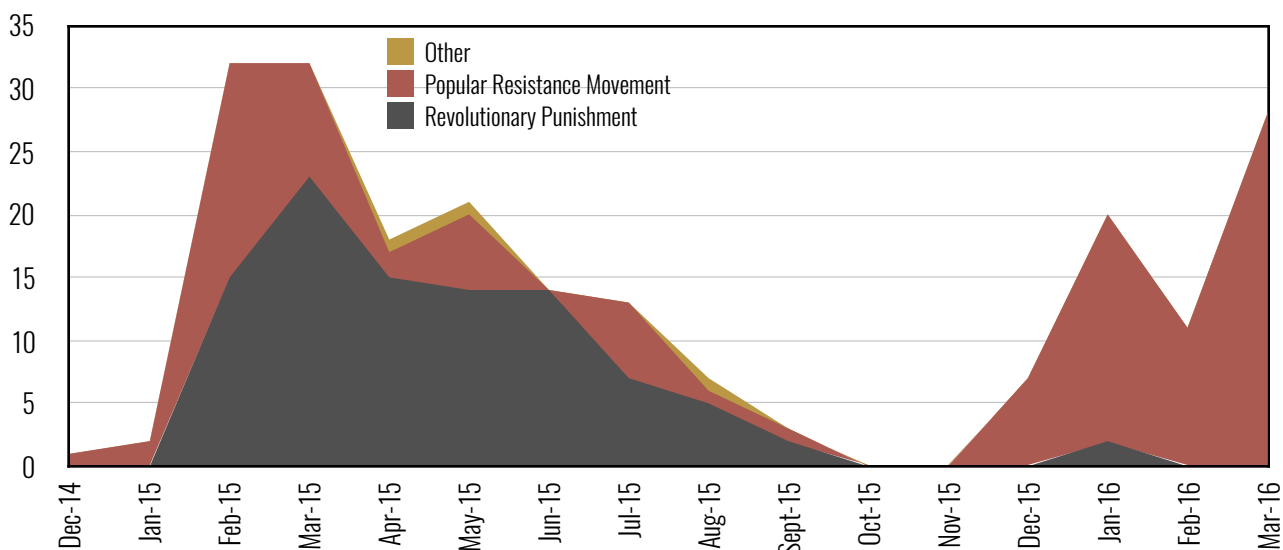
It is important to note that, while Wilayat Sinai has expanded its sphere of influence, built a nascent governing capacity, and restricted military counterinsurgency operations in certain areas, the organization

does not yet exercise *de facto* territorial control over any part of North Sinai (their governing capacity appears to be more rhetorical fiction than real control; see Jake Greene, “[Wilayat Sinai’s Tale of Control](#)”).

Popular Resistance Movement resurfaces with new, more distinctly Islamic character

After several months without reporting on any activity, the Popular Resistance Movement resurfaced, claiming attacks on a new Facebook page. The group had claimed 45 attacks from December 2014 to August 2015; barring a few road closures announced on its official social media accounts, three months passed between two of the group’s attacks, with one on [September 19](#) and the next (known) attack on [December 22](#). It is unclear whether the group was operational during the interim, but TIMEP is unaware of any social media presence at that time to confirm either way.¹

Attacks Claimed by APRM



In the days leading up to the fifth anniversary of the January 25 Revolution, however, the group resumed its reported activity. From January to March, the group claimed 57 distinct, premeditated attacks and publicized a variety of other activity (like road blockages, spontaneous engagement with police forces, and protest violence).

The majority of these attacks targeted security forces. The group claimed the killing of 10 individuals throughout the quarter, including seven noncommissioned police officers, a major, a lieutenant colonel, and a detective. Other attacks targeted transportation, power infrastructure, and private property. While the group does not normally target civilians (going so far as to offer explanation to those who disagree with the terror tactics that it uses and to offer an apology for using someone’s car without their permission), in several instances civilians were explicitly targeted or indirectly harmed. This included one instance in which the group chased and attacked a pastor in the province of Minya and another in which the group burned a supermarket in Sharqia province because the owner was suspected of collusion with security.

The renewed claims of activity suggest some transformations within the group, and the “Allied Popular Resistance Movement” network. As outlined in previous reports, the Allied Popular Resistance Movement

¹ The group issues its attack claims via its Facebook page. While some of these are corroborated via news media and many are accompanied by photo or video “evidence,” as with previous claims of attacks, TIMEP makes no attempt to verify the authenticity of the claims, only to provide analysis of the group’s reported activity.

(APRM) is an alliance between five predominately nationalist groups based in mainland Egypt: Revolutionary Punishment, Popular Resistance Movement(s), Execution Battalion, Beni Suef Revolutionaries Movement, and Helwan Brigades. (For more, see the [February 2015 Egypt Security Watch Briefing](#), pages 4 and 5).

Since PRM's earliest commentary on social media, the group has appeared as a secular-nationalist group focused mostly on economic and security sector targets. But the group's rhetoric has taken on a much more religious tone since the beginning of this quarter, with media posts now referring to members as *mujahideen* and citing Quranic passages in many of its claims. The group has rebranded and now features a logo bearing the motto "God, Martyrs, Revolution."

The group has emphatically rejected that it is involved with either the Muslim Brotherhood or any other political entity. While this can neither be confirmed nor refuted, some posts do suggest at least some degree of connection with that organization. In one post, the group lamented the "martyrdom" of al-Qassem Brigades (Hamas' military branch) fighters, and another promoted a video of a Muslim Brotherhood solidarity protest in London.

Over the quarter, PRM encouraged prospective members to form their own groups and carry out attacks to prove their commitment and loyalty—and it informed them that PRM would contact them in due time. They also published multiple instructional posts on carrying out different attacks and constructing improvised explosive and incendiary devices. The group warned against decoy pages established by the Interior Ministry as a means to entrap supporters to "arrest and torture them."

Relationship between Gazan and Egyptian groups remains unclear

A number of news items surfaced regarding the relationship between Egyptian groups and Hamas' military branch, al-Qassem Brigades. Despite the reports listed below, a great deal of obscurity still remains about concrete links. These items raised discussion and speculation about ties, particularly between al-Qassem and Wilayat Sinai.

- On *March 2*, news circulated about a letter that had reportedly been written by a disgruntled member of the Islamic State, which was apparently intended for the self-proclaimed Caliph of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. According to MEMRI, the letter was [meant](#) to inform Baghdadi of the ongoing cooperation between Wilayat Sinai and Hamas, a group which the Islamic State considers an apostate. The veracity of the letter is unverified.
- On *March 6*, Israel's internal security service [announced](#) that it had arrested a Palestinian who was actively recruiting Egyptians in Sinai, training them in Gaza, and then sending them to the West Bank.
- On *March 7*, the Egyptian Ministry of Interior announced it had arrested 14 individuals in connection with the June 2014 assassination of Hisham Barakat. It released [video-recorded confessions](#) in which the culprits described training stints with Hamas. (For more, see subsequent section on Security Developments.)
- On *March 9*, unnamed Egyptian security sources told *el-Watan* that Egypt had [identified](#) 250 (presumably Egyptian) militants affiliated with the Islamic State in Tel al-Zaatar, Gaza, who had received IED and vehicle-borne IED construction training from Hamas. The sources claimed that the individuals come into Sinai through smuggling tunnels in order to carry out attacks.
- On *March 23*, Hamas reportedly [warned](#) Egyptian authorities that two members of al-Qassem Brigades, including Abu Malek Abu Shawish and another high-level leader, had joined Wilayat Sinai without their knowledge.

- On *March 25*, a six-man special unit of al-Qassem Brigades led by Ghassan Arjani reportedly [entered](#) Sinai in secret in order to kidnap and return one of its rogue members, presumably one identified on March 23.

Proliferation of media amid global crackdown confuses reporting

TIMEP's last quarterly report noted international private sector efforts, particularly among social media and messaging applications (Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, YouTube) to censor "terrorist" media (see [Quarterly Report](#) Oct-Dec 2015, page 14). While these corporations do not outline any specific definition of "terrorism" per se, account closures have continued frequently; Twitter [announced the suspension](#) of "over 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts."

In response, terror groups and their supporters have adjusted their messaging strategies. High-profile Wilayat Sinai attacks or activities are promoted through the Islamic State's "Nashir" or "Amaq" accounts, ostensibly from the Islamic State's media control center in Raqqa. These are closed, private broadcasts through the Telegram messaging application; the group will create new accounts that it promotes with links that allow short-term (around one hour) access.

Smaller attacks and regular activities are promoted through an "unofficial," closed Telegram broadcast named after one of Wilayat Sinai's founders, Abu Suheib al-Ansari (also the namesake of the July 1 assault on Sheikh Zuweid). While this account also disseminates Wilayat Sinai media published through the aforementioned Islamic State "central" accounts, it generally features a wider range of lower-quality media. At times, this account is mirrored through Twitter accounts of the same name. It is not immediately clear why some activities are promoted from Raqqa as opposed to the local accounts, though the most prominent attacks are shared from central accounts.

Finally, at any point a number of (usually around three or four) Wilayat Sinai "news" accounts distribute news about Wilayat Sinai's activities. These are usually public Telegram broadcasts, and are closed and reopened frequently.

Hisham Ashmawy's Morabitoon releases a new video

On *March 2*, Hisham Ali Ashmawy, the self-proclaimed leader of Jamaat al-Morabitoon and former soldier in the Egyptian Special Forces ("Thunderbolt"), released his third voice recording, in which he calls on Egypt's religious scholars to support the cause of violent jihad against Sisi.

Ashmawy is considered an influential figure in the Shura Council of Mujahideen in Derna, a conglomeration of al-Qaeda affiliates in eastern Libya that maintains *de facto* control over the coastal city. Although his organization has made no official attack claims, Ashmawy is believed to have masterminded several large scale operations in Egypt (notably including an unsuccessful assassination [attempt](#) on Egypt's former Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim in September 2014). In August 2015, the Islamic State decried his involvement in the MSC and put him on a hit list.

Ashmawy is known to be connected to the broader North African al-Qaeda network. After an [attack](#) at Karm al-Qawadis on October 24, 2014—coordinated by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis—Ashmawy fled to Libya (likely Derna), reportedly [sustaining](#) injuries from security personnel as he traveled on North Sinai's Suez Road. According to uncorroborated reports, Ashmawy [trained](#) in several al-Qaeda bases near Derna, and was for some time under the supervision of Abdel Basit Azuz—advisor to al-Qaeda *amir* Ayman al-Zawahiri. (Azuz was reportedly [arrested](#) by Turkish Special Forces in December 2014.) Ashmawy also reportedly befriended Khaled Abu al-Abbas (known more commonly as Mokhtar Belmokhtar), leader of the Qaeda [affiliate](#) called al-Morabitoon. Whether this is the origin of his group's name and whether there is a formal connection between the organizations is unclear.

Ashmawy operated under the umbrella of [Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis](#) for some time during its period of loose affiliation with al-Qaeda. Along with a few military acquaintances, including Major Emad al-Din Abdel Hameed (known by aliases “Mostafa” and “Ramzy”), he [formed](#) an operational cell that “specialized in teaching killing techniques.” Some sources also claim that Ashmawy led a military training committee and acted as head of the organization’s [operational planning](#)—whether these are the same roles is not clear. (It should be noted that another source [described](#) ABM’s training official as Wael Muhammad Abdel Salam Abdullah Shamiya; this could either be a redundant position, or Wael could have performed this role following Ashmawy’s departure from ABM.)

“Below the Ashes” page resumes sporadic reporting

“Below the Ashes” resumed reporting on terrorist activity in mainland Egypt after a two-month blackout, publicizing eight attacks in various governorates in the first quarter. The Facebook page has acted as an unofficial mouthpiece for the APRM militant movements throughout mainland Egypt; the site does not report on the activities of the Islamic State or other takfiri organizations.

The sporadic reporting did not cover, however, the increased activity that the Popular Resistance Movement publicized over its own Facebook page. After the months-long hiatus in late 2015, this may indicate a parting of ways between the Facebook groups’ administrators and PRM leadership.

COUNTER-TERRORISM

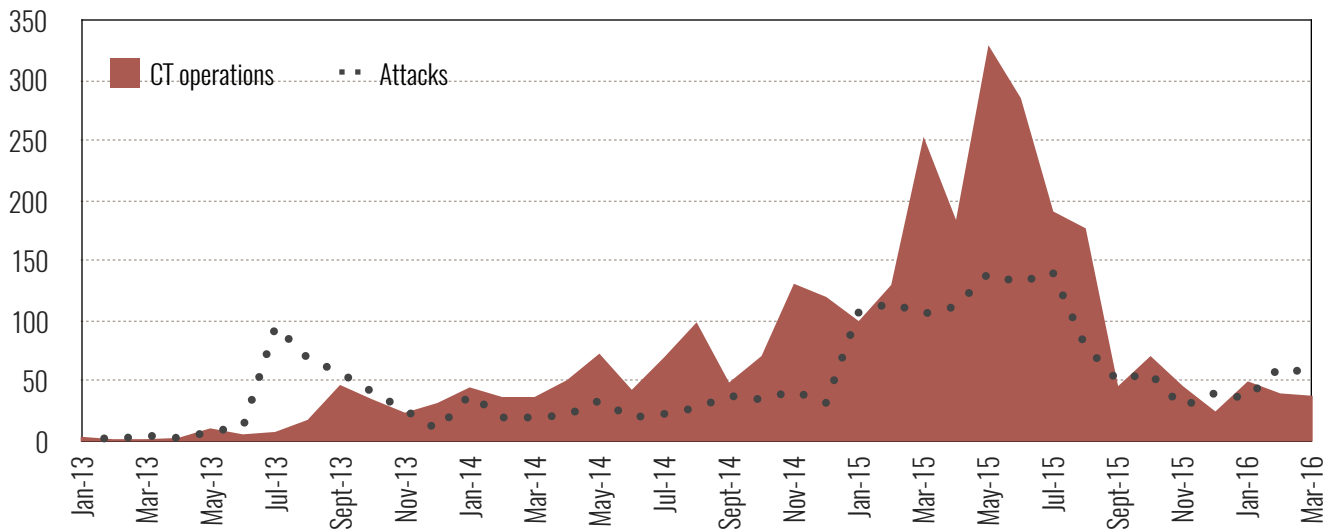
TRENDS

The following section showcases trends in reported counter-terror operations throughout Egypt.

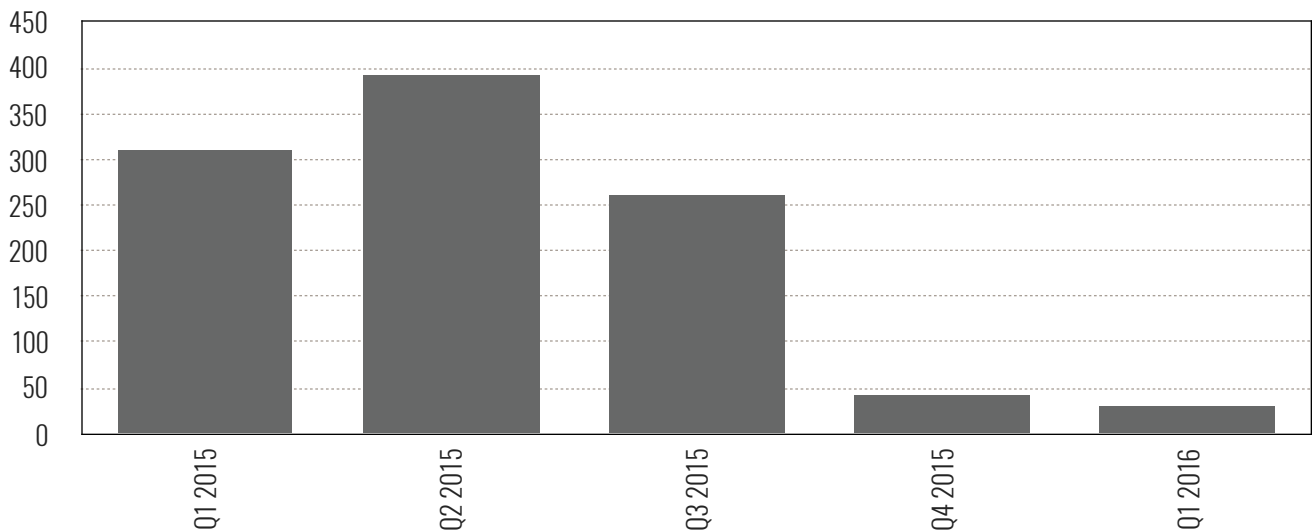
Counter-terror operations less reported in late-2015

Reports of counter-terror operations continued their lower pace from the previous quarter. From January to March 2016, 128 counter-terror operations were reported, compared to 142 counter-terror operations in the fourth quarter and 413 in the third quarter in 2015. The drop is directly related to a drop in reporting in official Ministry of Interior and Armed Forces spokesperson media outlets. Official reports in the first quarter of 2016 had dropped by 93% from their peak in 2015.

Counter-Terror Operations Reported (Egypt Overall)



Official Reports of Counter-terror Operations (by Quarter)

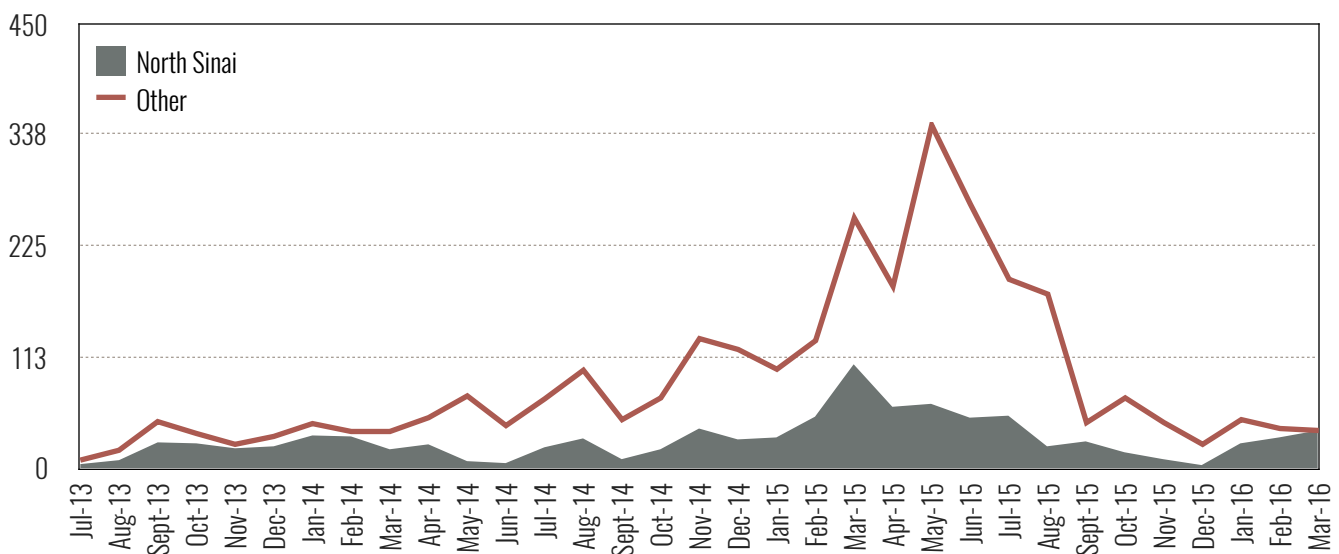


Deaths increase in counter-terror operations

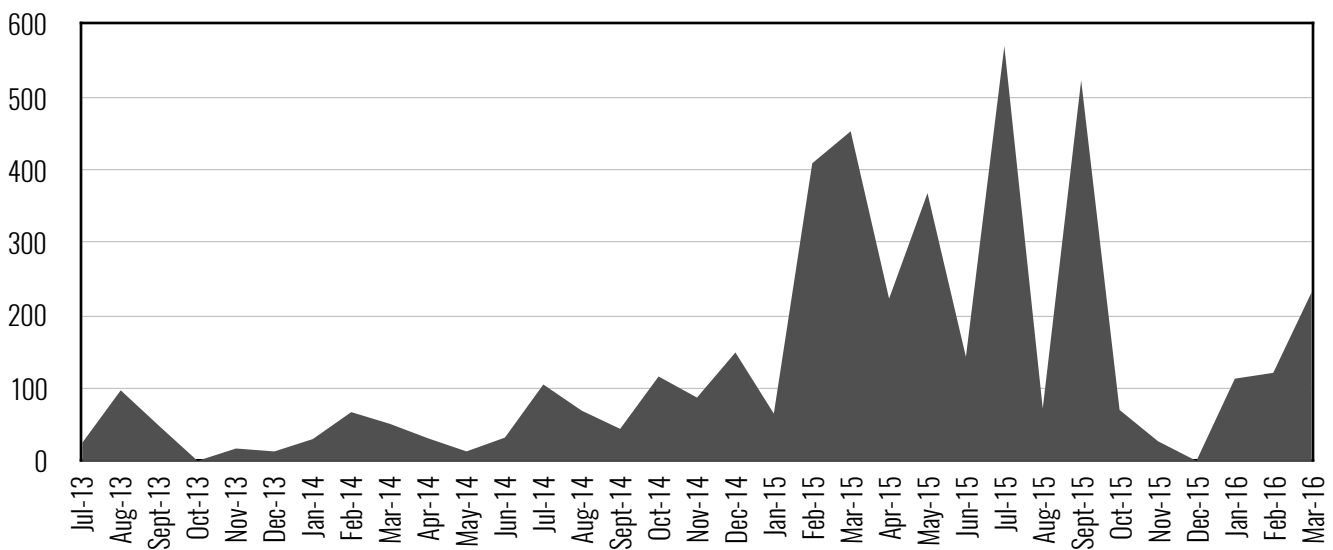
The majority of operations reported took place in North Sinai, where the military is continuing its “Martyr’s Right” security campaign (see subsequent section on Notable Security Operations). After periods of peaks and valleys corresponding to concentrated security efforts in North Sinai campaigns (often in response to large-scale attacks), the numbers killed in counter-terror operations steadily climbed over the course of the first quarter. To date, over 1,000 alleged “terrorists” have been reported killed in counter-terror efforts in North Sinai since the beginning of the Martyr’s Right campaign in September, and nearly 4,400 have been reported killed since Sisi asked for a popular mandate to counter terrorism in July 2013.

In addition to those killed during the military campaign in North Sinai, 14 individuals were killed during counter-terror operations in the rest of Egypt. Eight of these were alleged members of the Muslim Brotherhood and six members of Afnajad Misr.

Operations Reported



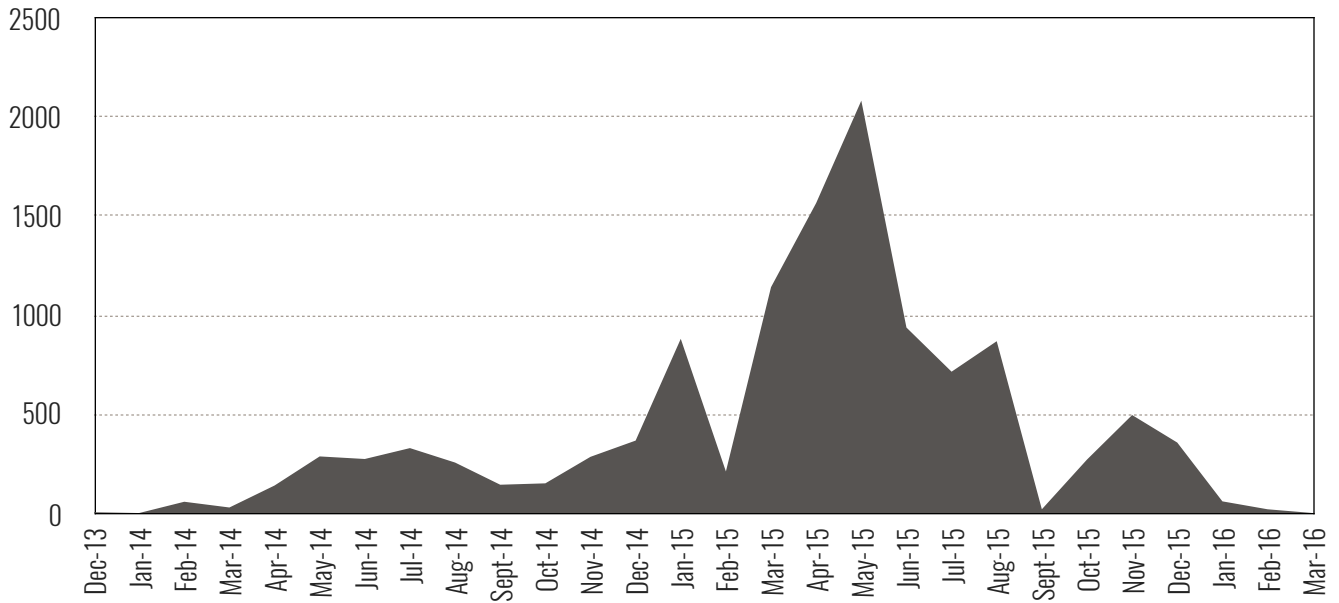
Deaths Reported in Counter-terror Operations (North Sinai)



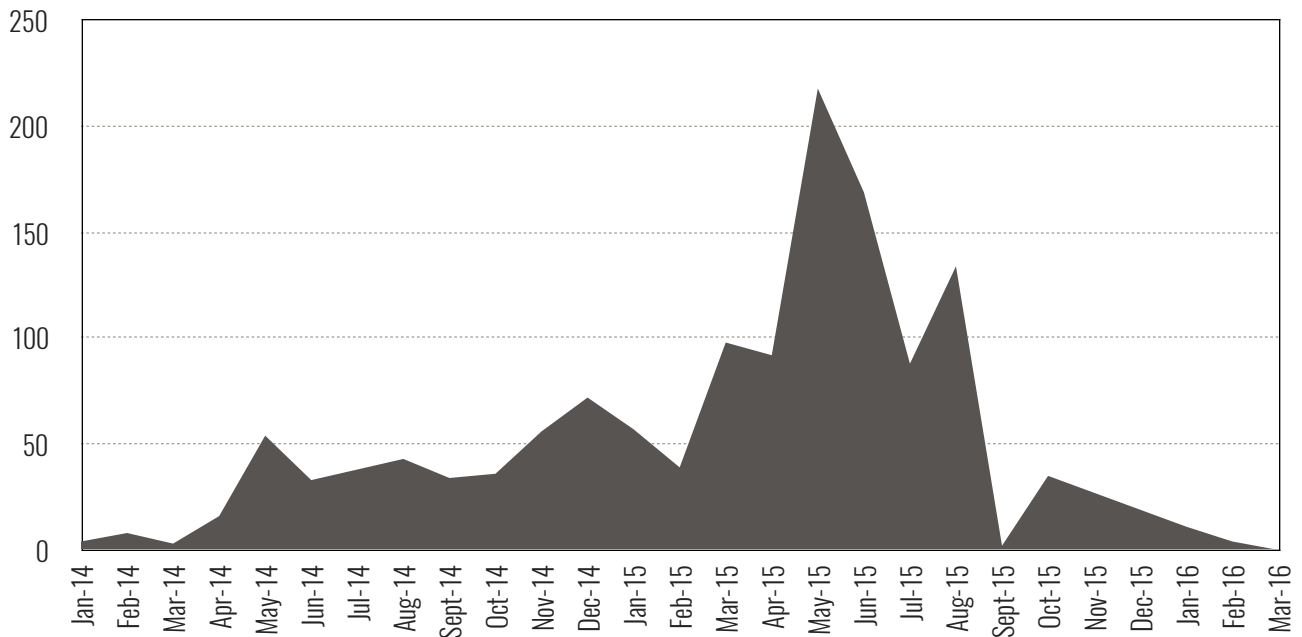
Targeting of Muslim Brotherhood eases

Along with the drop in counter-terror operations reported outside of the North Sinai province, the number of reported operations targeting the Muslim Brotherhood dropped significantly, as did the number of arrests. To date, nearly 12,000 alleged Muslim Brotherhood members have been arrested on terrorism charges since the Egyptian government declared the group to be a terrorist organization in December 2013.

Reported Arrests Targeting Muslim Brotherhood



Reported Operations Targeting Muslim Brotherhood



NOTABLE OPERATIONS

The following section details notable domestic security operations.

Ministry of Interior pins Barakat's assassination on Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas

Nine months after the assassination of Egyptian Prosecutor-General Hisham Barakat—the highest-level assassination in the past decade—on March 9 the Ministry of Interior released videos of recorded [confessions](#) of Barakat's purported assassins, with English subtitles. The four young men in the video revealed an elaborate network of clandestine operatives, and detailed efforts that began with their membership in the Muslim Brotherhood at al-Azhar University and included their passage through Sinai to train with Hamas in Gaza. The confessions included minute-by-minute details of the assassination and specific names of other Muslim Brotherhood members involved. Fourteen individuals were arrested in connection with the case.

In response, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas denied the allegations. Days after the allegations, a senior delegation from Hamas went to Cairo where they were hosted by the General Intelligence Services [in a Saudi-brokered meeting](#). During the meeting, Hamas [downplayed](#) its connection with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, denied any link to the assassination of Barakat, and promised to work with Egypt to counter terrorism in Sinai and Gaza. After attending other meetings in the region, [Hamas returned to Egypt](#) to discuss Egypt's prerequisites for reconciliation. Hamas raised its desire for greater openness between Gaza and Egypt, including increased trade and opening of the border crossing and expressed its willingness to cooperate; Muslim Brotherhood-related signs and posters were removed from Gazan streets after the discussions. (For more on the allegations and subsequent meetings, see Allison McManus and Jake Greene, "[Crying Wolf](#).")

For its part, the United States Department of State [said](#) that it "agree[d] with Egypt on the importance of holding culprits in the assassination of the former public prosecutor... to account," although it made no comment on the specific allegations.

Militarized counter-terror efforts persist in North Sinai; promises continue for development

In the first quarter of 2016, the Egyptian military continued its "Martyr's Right" campaign in North Sinai, beginning its third "phase." The third phase was indistinguishable from the first and second phases; it included aerial bombardment and ground operations, boasting [high kills](#) and [arrests of alleged terrorists](#) in the province.

As noted in the previous ESW quarterly report (See [Quarterly Report](#) Oct-Dec 2015, page 17), the military had announced that the second phase of the campaign was to focus on development efforts. While no progress has yet occurred to suggest the execution of development plans, several announcements were made in the first three months of 2016:

- The North Sinai Social Solidarity Department [said that it will pay LE1.13 million](#) in compensation to Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid citizens who have "been affected by terrorism and efforts to fight terrorism in North Sinai." The measure is particularly relevant to those who have been evicted from their homes in efforts to clear a buffer zone on the Gaza border; the North Sinai governor [spoke against continuing such efforts](#) on March 26.
- According to Sisi, [the military and government are working together on LE10 billion](#) in development projects in Sinai, including "new transport links and industrial and farming projects."
- On *March 21*, [Saudi Arabia agreed to finance \\$1.5 billion in Sinai development projects](#), signing several agreements.

Senior level militant commanders reported killed throughout first quarter of 2016

A number of high level operatives were reportedly killed during security operations in the first quarter.

- On *February 2*, the Ministry of Interior [claimed](#) to have killed two militants affiliated with Ajnad Misr, Muhammad Abbas Hussein Gad and Muhammad Ahmed Abdel Aziz Abdel Karim, who were planning to target public officials and security forces.
- On *February 8*, news outlets [reported](#) that Shadi al-Mena'ei was killed in an airstrike in North Sinai. The Ministry of the Interior later came forward and [denied](#) the reports, however, noting that it would inform the press as soon as he had been killed. (It is worth pointing out that al-Mena'ei has been reported killed on a number of occasions.)
- On *March 1*, Egyptian newspaper *al-Bawabh* [reported](#) that a number of Wilayat Sinai's senior leadership, including Ziyad Abu Farih, had been killed in Rafah during an exchange with the military.
- On *March 30*, the Third Field Army [reportedly](#) killed senior Wilayat Sinai leader Muhammad Nasr Madaan near Wadi Lisan in central North Sinai. The following day, the Third Field Army [reportedly](#) killed a Wilayat Sinai senior official, Abdullah Jumaa Eid, near Khariza in central North Sinai. The Third Field Army is technically responsible for operations in South Sinai, while the Second Field Army's mandate includes the North. It is possible that the jurisdictional boundaries may be blurring with the creation of the Unified Command for the Area East of the Canal and for Counterterrorism (led by Lieutenant General [Osama Askar](#)).

SECURITY SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS

The following section details important developments in Egypt's domestic security agencies.

MFO retreats from outposts in North Sinai

The Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission in North Sinai evacuated at least four observation outposts in March. The most [recent](#) of these closures came only hours after a large-scale attack on Arish's Safa checkpoint, which killed at least 13 security personnel and prompted reconsideration of the mission's status quo. The U.S. Department of Defense, which now garrisons 700 troops in Sinai as part of the 1,680-member peacekeeping mission, [announced](#) that it was considering the transfer of an unspecified number of soldiers from the northern facility near Gorah to southern Sinai. The United States was reportedly in talks with the Egyptian and Israeli governments concerning the move, and more than 100 American personnel have already been [transferred](#). Pentagon Spokesman Jeff Davis, hinting at force reduction in Sinai, [noted](#) that the Department of Defense is considering automating its observation activity with remote surveillance technology. Despite these concerns, Fiji, which has more than 300 troops in Sinai and, along with the U.S. mission, sustained an attack last year that [injured](#) six, has said that peacekeepers will [remain](#) in place.

In addition to its northern location, the MFO operates a much smaller [facility](#) on the Red Sea, near Sharm el-Sheikh, and until recently also operated 23 remote sites in Zone C. The Egyptian military's checkpoint at Gorah, which abuts the North Camp, has, in particular, been the focus of a number of Wilayat Sinai's attacks in the past year.

Senior officials promise reform in security sector

After several acts of police violence caused outrage in early 2016 (notably that relating to abuse at a hospital in Matareya and the Medical Syndicate protest in response, see Amani Massoud, "[Then They Came for the Doctors](#)"), Egyptian officials considered efforts to carry out some security sector reform.

Parliament was divided over how to deal with police abuse. Some, like MP Muhamamd Anwar al-Sadat, called for the minister of interior's resignation, while MP Mortada Mansour [claimed that](#) "those who call for reforming the interior ministry are in fact trying their best to undermine the Egyptian state."

The ministry announced that it was considering [phasing out the existing rank of non-commissioned police officer](#) and replacing it with police "assistants," who will be better educated and receive specialized training in areas like human rights. The new rank (which would hold powers of arrest) was authorized by presidential decree in an amendment to the 1971 police code (read TIMEP's analysis of the decree at the [Legislation Catalog](#), Decree Creating New Police Rank). It is unclear why the ministry would not offer the same special human rights training to its existing ranks of police forces.

Fallout continues after October downing of Russian airliner

After the tragic downing of a Russian airliner in October of last year, in which 224 Russian civilians were killed, Egypt continues to face repercussions. Investigations into the cause of the crash have not yet concluded.

- *Domestic security measures increase:* In January 2016, Egypt [announced](#) that LE250 million would be allocated to increase security, including scanning and detection equipment and an integrated surveillance system, at Egyptian resorts. Aviation Minister Hossam Kamal [said](#) in early February 2016 that a special company would be established to oversee airport security in Egypt. Also in February, Cairo International Airport [purchased](#) two explosive detecting devices that will inspect all vehicles before entering the airport. And, the Egyptian Civil Aviation Ministry [signed](#) a deal with British Control Risks to assess security measures at Egyptian airports. In March, a security committee headed by the prime minister was [formed](#) and the Ministry of Tourism announced that \$32 million of its budget would be allocated to improve airport security.
- *Sisi acknowledges terrorism "may have" played a role:* Sisi [alluded](#) in a speech in late March that the plane crash may have been [terrorism](#), the first statement from an Egyptian official acknowledging the role that terrorism may have played.
- *Russia Demands Oversight:* In January 2016, the Russian Transport Minister [demanded](#) that Russia have oversight over all stages of security in Egyptian airports when Russian citizens are involved. The request was made [again](#) in late March as a precondition to the resumption of flights between Cairo and Russia. The chairman of the Egyptian Airports Company Adel Mahgoub [rejected](#) the demand to have Russian security officers permanently stationed at Egyptian airports. Mahgoub said that the idea was completely unacceptable and that Russia was entitled to provide security aboard their planes but not at Egyptian airports generally. Flights have not resumed between the two countries but have remained a talking point from officials on both sides. During Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry's visit to Moscow in mid-March, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [said](#) that Russia and Egypt are working together to complete preparations to [restore](#) flights between the two countries as soon as possible. He offered no dates. Shoukry [said](#) that Egypt was awaiting Russia's signal. In late March, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov [said](#) that Russia hopes to reinstate flights by the summer. In late April, the Russian transport minister [said](#) again that Russia hoped to resume flights to Egypt in 2016.
- *Flights resume after security inspections:* In mid-April, Germany [negotiated](#) with Egypt to ease restrictions on flights after German security experts [completed](#) a two-day inspection of security measures in place in Hurgada airport in mid-March. Later that month, a [delegation](#) from the U.S. Department of Transportation was in Egypt to inspect security procedures at the Cairo Airport. A

delegation of Russian aviation security experts was also in Egypt to [inspect](#) security procedures at Sharm el Sheikh and Hurghada airports.

In early March, British travel company Thomas Cook, which has extensive operations in Egypt, decided to [extend](#) its cancellation of bookings to Sharm el-Sheikh until October 31, 2016—a full year after the Russian plane crash. Meanwhile, according to then-Tourism Minister Hisham Zaazou, British airline EasyJet will [resume](#) flights to Sharm el-Sheikh on May 29, 2016. British Airways has plans to resume flights in September of 2016.

- *Egypt's tourism sector continues to fall:* The World Bank Group released a [report](#) in January entitled “Global Economic Prospects.” In the report, the World Bank [revised](#) its projection of Egypt’s economic growth down 0.7 percentage points, due in part to a weakening tourism sector. In the first quarter of 2016, Egypt netted \$500 million in tourism revenue [compared](#) to \$1.5 billion the previous year. Only 1.2 million tourists have visited Egypt thus far in 2016, compared to 2.2 million in the first quarter of 2015.

Ministry of Interior moves to new location

The Ministry of Interior [moved](#) into its new headquarters in New Cairo's First Settlement on January 23, just before the fifth anniversary of the January 25 Revolution. The move relocates the minister's office, public and media relations, police affairs, and human rights departments from Lazoghly in downtown Cairo. The new facility, housed within the walls of the Police Academy, currently uses 1,000 conscripts to guard the premises, though Sisi has [asked for](#) a reduction in this number to reduce costs. The move to the new campus will presumably afford the ministry an added layer of protection from terrorist attacks.

Head of North Sinai security directorate sacked after major attack

Interior Minister [Magdy Abdel Ghaffar appointed](#) Major General Sayyed al-Habal, previously ministry training and reform agent, to replace Major General Ali Abu Zeid as head of North Sinai's security directorate. The change came only two days after a gunman [killed](#) five police personnel in Arish. Abu Zeid will now act as Deputy Assistant Interior Minister for Sinai.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

LEGAL AND JUDICIAL DEVELOPMENTS

The following section provides updates on notable security-related developments in Egypt's legal and judicial system. It covers notable legal actions, court cases, and legislation.

Prosecutions against Muslim Brotherhood continue

In its continued crackdown against the terrorist-designated Muslim Brotherhood organization, prosecutions continued in Egypt's military and civilian courts. As noted in the last quarterly report, the obscurity, particularly around military trials, makes a comprehensive account of these trials difficult.

However, several notable developments merit highlighting:

- An administrative court [ruled](#) that the Ministry of Interior must cancel weapons licenses granted to members of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012.
- Public prosecutors [referred footballer Mohamed Aboutrika](#) to prosecution for funding the Muslim Brotherhood. Aboutrika's share in a company that he co-founded with a member of the Muslim Brotherhood was seized last May.
- A military court in Alexandria [sentenced seven Muslim Brotherhood members to death](#) for their alleged involvement in the 2015 bombing at Kafr al-Sheikh Stadium that killed three military cadets.
- A [military court in Assiut sentenced 117 members of the Muslim Brotherhood](#) to 5-10 years in prison for their alleged attack on a church and an electricity transformer.

The Muslim Brotherhood was designated a terrorist organization in a December 2013 government decree, criminalizing the group and its members' activities; their registration under the Terrorist Entities Law further extends to administrative action, including asset freezes. (For more on Egypt's counter-terrorism legislation, see Mai El-Sadany, "[Designating a Terrorist: Process Unchecked](#)" and "[The Terrorist Entities Law: Egypt's Latest](#).")

New security legislation enacted and old legislation ratified

In early January, [Sisi issued a decree to extend the state of emergency](#) in North Sinai for an additional three months, for a total of 18 months since its initial declaration in October 2014. Because the decree was issued before parliament was technically seated (although it was published in the Official Gazette and enacted afterward), [Speaker Ali Abdel Al deemed parliamentary deliberation to be unnecessary](#), and he ratified it without discussion on January 17.

In his last days as legislator, [Sisi also enacted legislation to criminalize](#) the use of "terrorist symbols." Penalties include imprisonment or up to LE30,000 fines for those who even temporarily use these symbols, including "recording, documenting, printing or broadcasting."

During the first 15 days in session in which it was mandated to review all laws enacted by presidential decree, [the House of Representatives approved the anti-terrorism law](#), as well as all other security-related laws enacted by executive decree under Sisi. The controversial law includes provisions for special courts, limits reporting on terrorism, and protects law enforcement from legal ramifications. [Only 24 \(of 596\) members of parliament](#) voted against the law, which was passed with no amendment.

For more information and context on laws and decrees issued by Sisi, see [TIMEP's Legislation Tracker](#) project. (Future legislation issued by parliament will be featured in an upcoming TIMEP project.)

Handling of terrorism cases continues to raise concerns about detainee rights

The handling of terrorism cases throughout the first quarter raised continued concerns about the rights of detainees. Based on Egyptian legislation, cases in which crimes are deemed to have undermined national security may be tried in military court, even when perpetrators are civilians. These concerns appeared well founded when a four-year-old child was sentenced to life in prison in February. On February 21, the Armed Forces spokesman admitted that the child's name had been "mistakenly" added to a list of alleged Muslim Brotherhood members.

Forced disappearances have also caused persistent concerns of late. Islam Hamzay, who faces charges of spreading jihadist ideologies and recruiting young men to travel to Syria, [disappeared on January 3 and was detained for 70 days](#) without any notification to his family or lawyer.

Mohamed al-Zawahiri ordered released

On *February 23*, Cairo Criminal Court [ordered](#) the release of Muhammad Rabiaa al-Zawahiri, pending an investigation into [charges](#) that he organized an al-Qaeda affiliated group. The prosecutor-general [challenged](#) the decision the next day, but he was later [released](#) on March 17. Muhammad al-Zawahiri, brother of al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri and a former senior figure in Egyptian Islamic Jihad, has had a turbulent relationship with Egyptian intelligence services and is [believed](#) to have been one of the individuals behind the U.S. embassy protests in Cairo in 2012. Muhammad al-Zawahiri had spent more than two and half years in prison before his release in March.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The following section provides updates on notable security-related developments in Egypt's domestic and foreign politics. It covers notable speeches, meetings, and positions.

Global allies pledge cooperation in domestic counter-terrorism

As turmoil in Libya and Syria persisted into its sixth year, global leaders became ever more concerned with Egypt's stability. Particularly given the threat of spillover violence on Egypt's western border with Libya, and the potential flow of fighters to and from Syria, high-level meetings took place throughout the first quarter to pledge support for Egypt's domestic security efforts.

These included:

- On *January 18*, Director of Central Intelligence John Brennan [met](#) in Cairo with Sisi and Minister of Interior Magdy Abdel-Ghaffar. The officials discussed the Islamic State, the Muslim Brotherhood, and general counterterrorism and military cooperation.
- On *February 18*, an Australian military delegation [started](#) a five-day visit, during which it met with senior Egyptian military leaders to discuss bilateral counterterrorism cooperation and to offer its expertise in IED dismantlement.
- On *February 20*, Defense Minister Sedki Sobhi [met](#) in Cairo with U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford to discuss bilateral security cooperation.

- On *Sunday, February 21*, Sisi [met](#) with Nigerian President Mohamed [Buhari to discuss the impact of Libyan instability on the African coast and Sahara](#), and ways in which to address terrorism.
- On *Thursday, February 23*, British Ambassador to Egypt John Casson [said](#) that the United Kingdom will not leave Egypt “to deal with [terrorism and tourism] problems alone – to beat terrorism we have to keep Egypt's economy strong.”

The World Economic Forum - Middle East and North Africa postpones meeting

The World Economic Forum - Middle East and North Africa, [postponed its spring meeting in Egypt](#), citing security concerns. While the organizers insisted the event was not cancelled, no new date was set for the regional version of the Davos forum.



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