



EGYPT

SECURITY WATCH

QUARTERLY REPORT: JANUARY – MARCH 2017



The Tahrir Institute
for Middle East Policy

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 has always been dynamic, responding to the changing contours of the situation on the ground and to the needs of its audience.

Since the publication of our last quarterly report, we have been exploring the new and emerging trends in Egypt's security situation, particularly the activity of actors on the mainland and increasing sectarian targeting, particularly through high-profile attacks. To better provide our audience with information on these, the project team has updated the profiles found on the project website, as well as collaborated in the issuance of several special briefings, in addition to this quarterly report.

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 terrorism (as defined by the state), 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 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 our continued initiatives through the Egypt Security Watch project will contribute to a sound understanding of the security situation necessary to inform this policy approach.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TERRORISM

A wave of attacks on Coptic Christians continued in the first quarter of 2017, including seven targeted murders of Copts in Arish, North Sinai. Three of the attacks were claimed by Wilayat Sinai, the Islamic State's local affiliate. Hundreds of Copts fled North Sinai to other places in Egypt.

The Islamic State's increased targeting of Egyptian Christians and Christian institutions over the past two quarters represents an **apparent shift in the Islamic State's overall strategy toward Egypt**. The campaign against Christians was mentioned in propaganda by both Wilayat Sinai and the Islamic State in Egypt.

Reported activity in North Sinai declined again in the first quarter. One hundred and thirty-two attacks were reported across North Sinai, **down 15 percent** from the 155 attacks reported last quarter, and a one-third decrease from the 197 reported in the quarter before that.

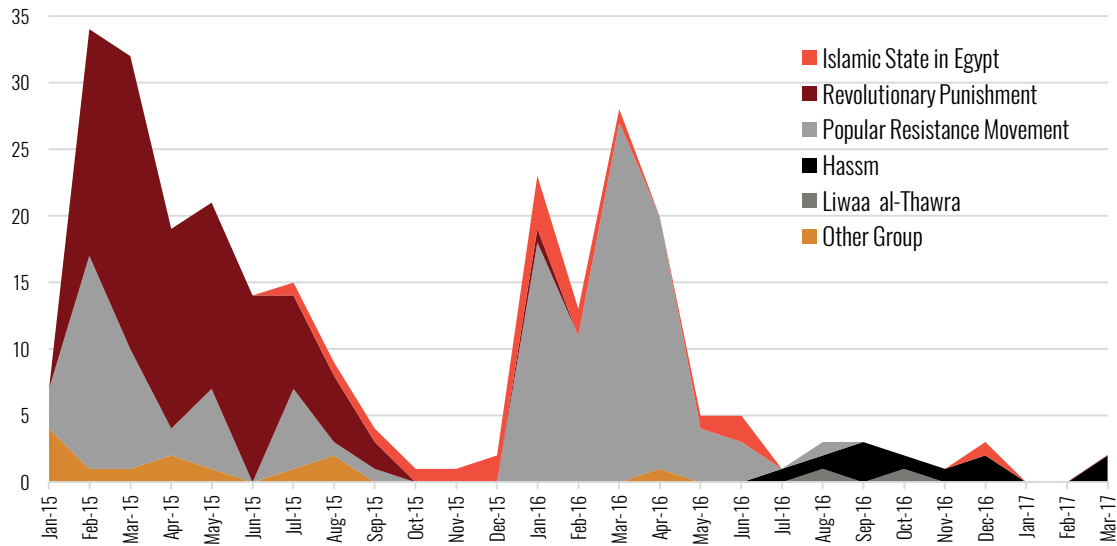
Despite the decrease in attacks, total reported **fatalities in North Sinai increased in the first quarter**. One hundred and thirty-six total fatalities were reported in the first quarter, **up nearly 16 percent** from the previous quarter.

One hundred thirty-five attacks were reported throughout Egypt in the first quarter of 2017, compared to a quarterly average of 203 attacks in 2016.

Total reported fatalities across Egypt decreased to **145 this quarter**, down about seven percent from 156 in the previous quarter. **Security-related fatalities increased nearly 21 percent**, from 85 in the fourth quarter to 103 this quarter. Civilian fatalities fell from 71 in the last quarter to 42 in the first quarter, representing a 40 percent decrease.

Reported terror activity in mainland Egypt (i.e., outside Sinai) fell to only three incidents in the first quarter of 2017, compared to 13 in the last quarter of 2016 and 11 in the third quarter of last year. Hassm claimed two of the incidents, while the third went unclaimed.

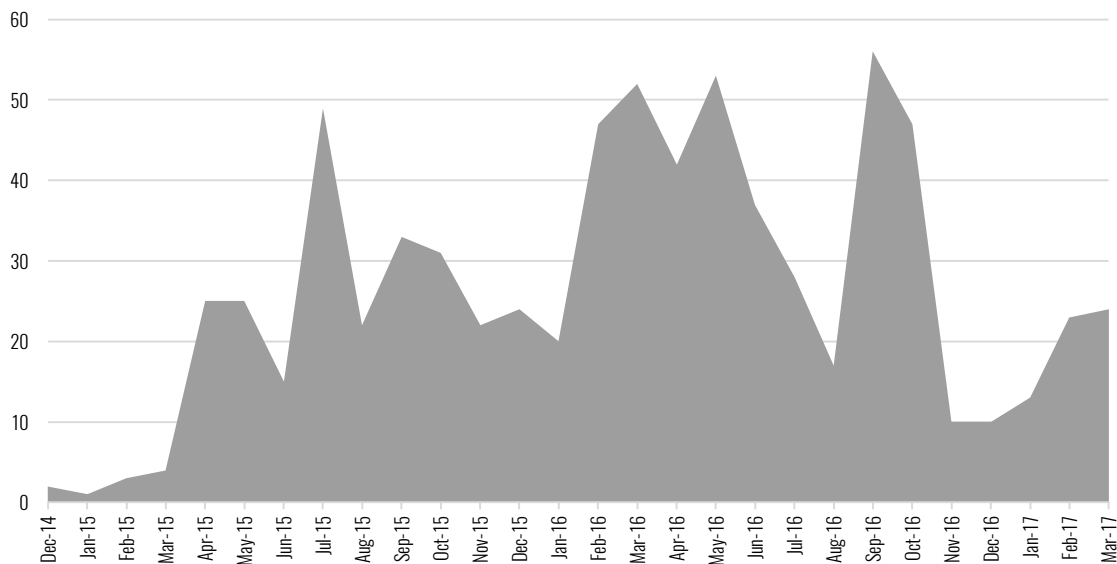
Claimed Attacks Outside North Sinai



Use of firearms as a percentage of overall weapons used in North Sinai has trended upward since the end of the fourth quarter of 2015, when use of improvised explosives was at a peak.

Wilayat Sinai claimed 60 incidents this quarter, representing a 10 percent drop from the previous quarter.

Attacks Claimed by Wilayat Sinai



Wilayat Sinai promoted the activities of its *hisbah* (morality police) in a video and an interview with the *hisbah* emir.

Hassm issued claims of responsibility for two attacks in the first quarter of 2017, bringing its total claimed activity through the end of March 2017 to 11 attacks.

Eight policemen were killed and three wounded in an unclaimed attack in New Valley. The attack was just the sixth reported in that governorate since July 2013.

Both Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra released propaganda videos depicting training and operations.

Hisham Ashmawy, self-proclaimed emir of al-Morabitoun, also released a voice recording, his fourth since March 2016 but first since July 2016.

COUNTER-TERRORISM

Reported counter-terror activity decreased in the first quarter of 2017, with 55 operations reported. Forty-five counter-terror operations were reported in North Sinai province.

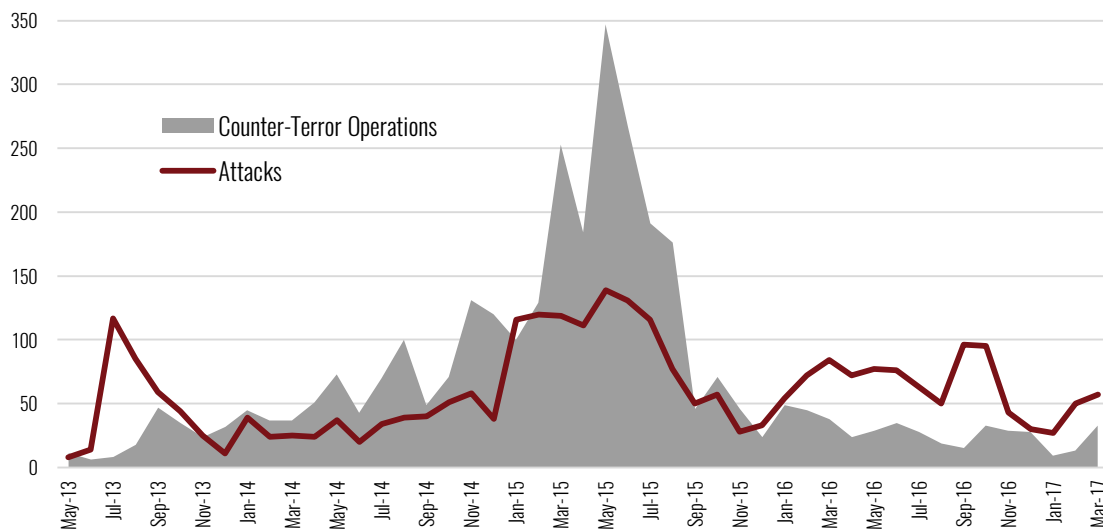
Officially reported counter-terror operations rose from 24 in the fourth quarter to 31 this quarter; other operations were reported in media outlets but not explicitly confirmed by state entities.

The number of reported deaths in counter-terror operations across Egypt decreased from 397 in the fourth quarter of 2017 to 150 deaths this quarter.

The number of reported arrests in counter-terror operations across Egypt increased from 225 in the fourth quarter of 2016 to 419 arrests this quarter. The number of officially reported arrests across Egypt also grew, from 40 arrests in the fourth quarter to 353 arrests this quarter.

At least two operations explicitly targeting Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra were reported in the first quarter of 2017. Liwaa al-Thawra released a martyrdom announcement days later lamenting the deaths of four of its fighters.

**Reported Counter-Terror Operations across Egypt
(Compared to Attacks across Egypt)**



The military notably **promoted Colonel Tamer al-Refaie as the new spokesman** for the armed forces. The outgoing spokesman, Brigadier General Muhammad Samir, joined a private media company as chairman of its board of directors. The **president also promoted the commander of the Republican Guard, Ahmed Zaki**, to the rank of lieutenant general.

Noncommissioned police officers at South Sinai police stations reportedly **went on strike in January** because of a **five-day decrease in vacation time** as laid out in a ministerial resolution issued days before the strike.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

In January, President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi issued Decree 56, **extending the state of emergency** in areas of North Sinai for an additional three months. The Cabinet announced its decision on February 18 to **ban motorcycles** in Arish, Sheikh Zuweid, Rafah, and other areas of North Sinai. The South Sinai Security Directorate increased security measures for tourists visiting Sinai, **requiring tourists to present hotel bookings at checkpoints**.

Omar Abdel Rahman, the leader of the Gama'a al-Islamiya known as "the blind sheikh," **died in a federal prison in the United States**, after more than 20 years behind bars. More than 2,000 people attended his funeral in Gamaliya, his village in Egypt, and a number of groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda, reportedly **released statements** mourning his death.

A counter-terror operation in which the Ministry of Interior killed 10 individuals who are believed to have been arrested months prior **sparked uproar among families in Arish**, prompting a partial civil strike.

Cairo Sixth Circuit Court listed 1,538 individuals as terrorists, banning them from traveling, freezing their assets, denying them their political rights, and canceling their passports. The defendants included leading figures from the Brotherhood and their families, young activists, and public figures.

TERRORISM

TRENDS

The following section showcases trends in reported violence throughout Egypt.

Reports of attacks decline across the mainland

Following the downward trend established in previous quarters, reported terror activity across the Egyptian mainland¹ fell to only three incidents in the first quarter of 2017, compared to 13 in the previous quarter and 11 in the third quarter of last year. The incidents in the first quarter were carried out in the provinces of New Valley, Qalyubia, and Damietta.² The first quarter represents the lowest incidence of terrorism in mainland Egypt in the past 17 quarters.

Only the attack in New Valley went unclaimed. In that attack, unknown gunmen assaulted Naqab checkpoint, fatally shooting eight policemen and injuring three others. Attacks in New Valley are relatively rarely reported, with only five incidents reported there since July 2013. (Of those prior attacks, three were claimed—one each by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Wilayat Sinai, and the Popular Resistance Movement.)

Hassm claimed the other two incidents, which were in Qalyubia and Damietta. Those provinces have seen 41 and 22 incidents, respectively, since July 2013.

Reports of attacks in North Sinai decrease, yet fatalities increase

Reported activity in North Sinai province declined for the second consecutive quarter. One hundred and thirty-two attacks were reported across North Sinai, down 15 percent from the 155 attacks reported last quarter. Compared to the same period in 2016, activity in the first quarter is down less than three percent. Given interruptions in terror groups' communication and the ongoing media blackout in North Sinai, it is not clear if the decline of the past two quarters reflects decreased activity or decreased reporting of terror activity.

Seventy-two of the 132 total incidents, or about 55 percent of the total activity reported in the province, went unclaimed. By comparison, approximately 52 percent of all terror activity in the second half of 2016 and 24 percent in the first half went unclaimed. Forty-two percent of all activity in North Sinai since November 2014 is unclaimed.

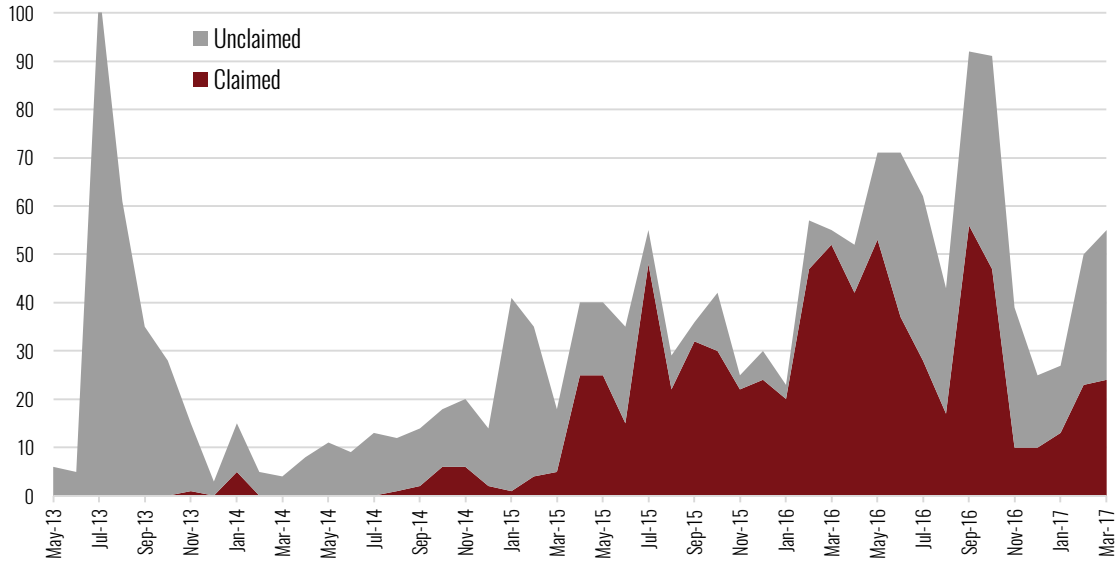
Number of Attacks Reported

2013			
	Outside North Sinai	North Sinai	Total
Q1	10	0	10
Q2	11	14	25
Q3	60	201	261
Q4	34	46	80
TOTAL	115	261	376
2014			
Q1	64	24	88
Q2	53	28	81
Q3	74	39	113
Q4	95	52	147
TOTAL	286	143	429
2015			
Q1	261	94	355
Q2	266	115	381
Q3	123	120	243
Q4	21	97	118
TOTAL	671	426	1097
2016			
Q1	75	135	210
Q2	31	194	225
Q3	12	197	209
Q4	13	155	168
TOTAL	131	681	812
2017			
Q1	3	132	135

¹ TIMEP uses "mainland" to refer to areas outside of the Sinai Peninsula.

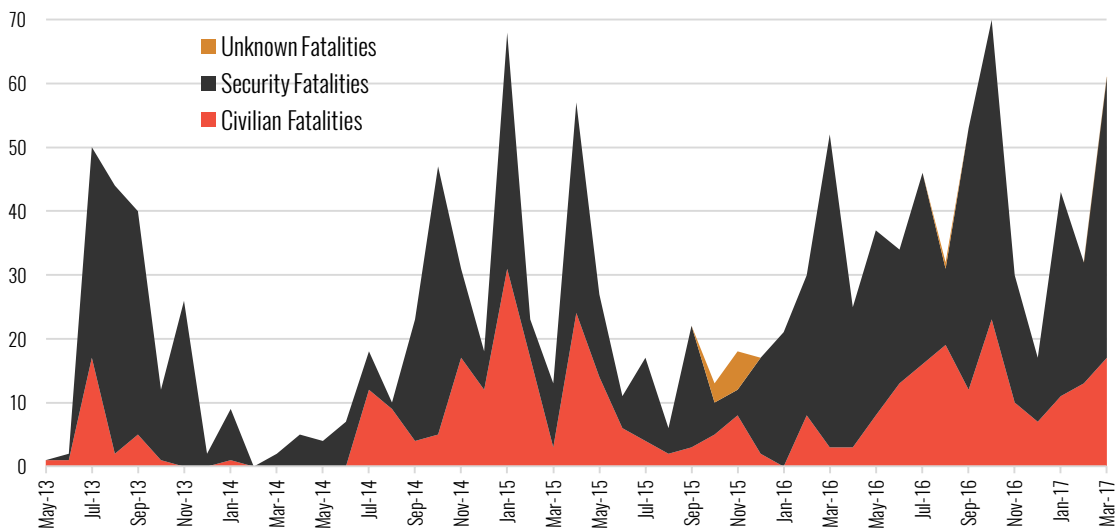
² Egypt Security Watch could not establish political motivation for an incident on March 24, 2017, in the Maadi neighborhood of Cairo province, in which a foreign object exploded as a doorkeeper inspected it, killing him and injuring his wife and children. That attack was excluded from our data. See our methodology section for more information on incidents that we include in our data.

Attacks Reported in North Sinai



Reported fatalities in North Sinai increased this quarter. One hundred and thirty-six total fatalities were reported in the first quarter, up nearly 16 percent from the previous quarter.³ Security personnel fatalities are up about 23 percent from last quarter, with 95 security personnel reported killed over the first quarter of 2017. Reported civilian fatalities held constant with 41 reported killed, compared to 40 in the fourth quarter.

Fatalities in Attacks Reported in North Sinai (Excluding Metrojet Disaster)



³ The Islamic State claimed to have killed 44 security personnel during attacks south of Arish on March 3, but independent sources have not confirmed any of these casualties.

Total reported casualties in North Sinai decreased this quarter. Two hundred and thirty-four security and civilian casualties were reported this quarter, down about nine percent from 258 reported casualties in the fourth quarter. Casualties among security personnel increased from 156 casualties last quarter to 168 this quarter, representing an eight percent increase. Civilian casualties dropped from 102 in the fourth quarter to 66 this quarter, about 35 percent.

Casualties among security personnel increase, while overall rates see a temporary drop

Total reported fatalities across Egypt decreased to 145 this quarter, down about seven percent from 156 last quarter, but fell at a much lower rate than the nearly 20 percent drop in attacks. Fatalities among security forces increased nearly 21 percent, from 85 in the fourth quarter to 103 this quarter.

Civilian fatalities fell from 71 in the last quarter to 42 in the first quarter, representing a 40 percent decrease from the previous quarter, and civilian injuries were also down. (The Islamic State in Egypt attacked St. Peter's and St. Paul's Coptic Orthodox Church in Cairo in December 2016, and these numbers will likely rise dramatically in the second quarter of 2017, given the high civilian casualty counts in Islamic State-claimed attacks in Tanta, Alexandria, and Minya.)

Wilayat Sinai attack claims recover but decrease overall

Following a dip in Wilayat Sinai's claimed activity between November and January, their reported activity recovered slightly in the first quarter; however, the group's overall reported activity remained lower than the first three quarters of 2016. Wilayat Sinai claimed only 60 incidents in the first quarter, representing a 10 percent drop from the last quarter. Compared to average claims per month over 2016, Wilayat Sinai's total activity this quarter is down about 15 attacks per month. Wilayat Sinai claimed 45 percent of total reported attacks in North Sinai, compared to 43 and 51 percent in the previous two quarters, respectively. Wilayat Sinai claimed 62 percent of all reported attacks in North Sinai throughout 2016. Given the still relatively high level of unclaimed activity in North Sinai, the downward trend in Wilayat Sinai claims may simply represent a decrease in claimed activity rather than a decline in actual activity, but this cannot be confirmed.

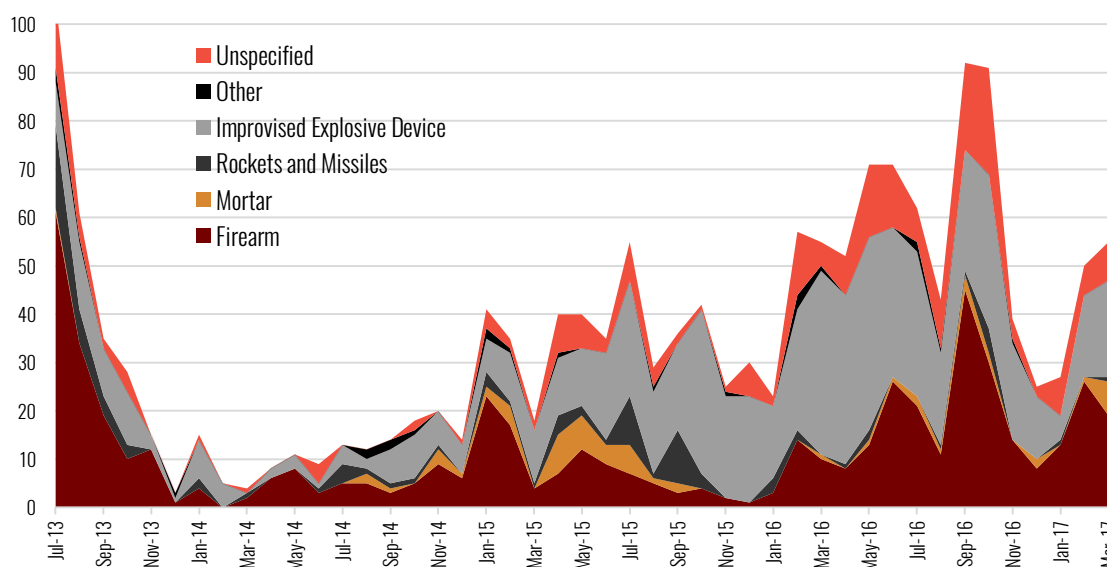
Percentage of Reported North Sinai Attacks Claimed by Wilayat Sinai



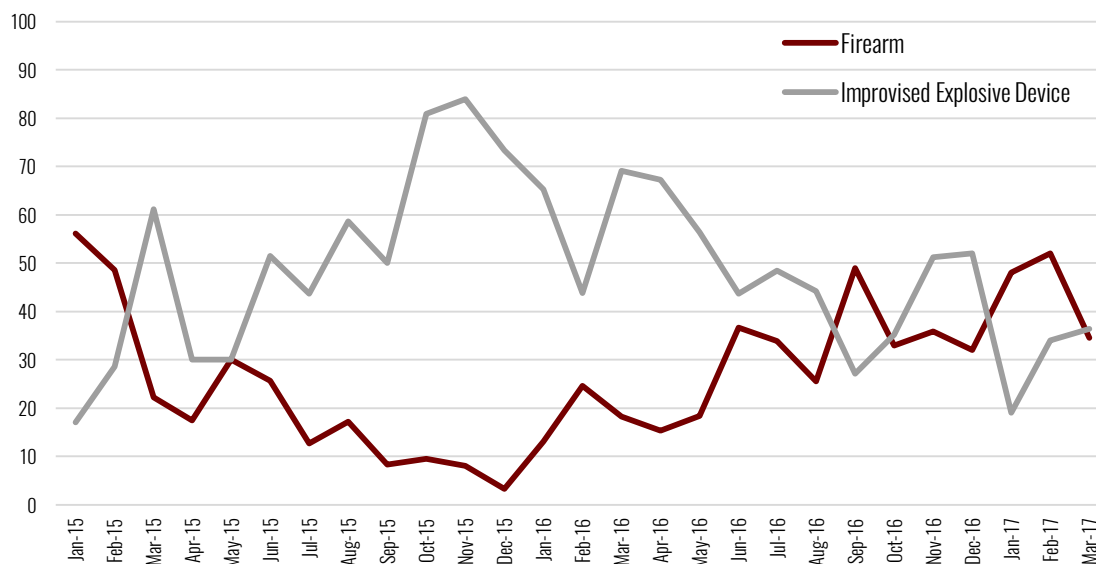
Use of improvised explosives in North Sinai attacks declines

Following a brief resurgence in the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in November and December 2016, firearms reemerged in the first quarter as the most commonly used weapon in attacks reported in North Sinai. Fifty-eight attacks involved the use of firearms, 42 IEDs, eight mortars, and two rockets and missiles. For 22 attacks, the weapons used were not specified.

Weapon Use in Attacks in North Sinai



Weapons as a Percentage of Attacks in North Sinai



Use of firearms as a percentage of overall attacks has trended upward since the end of the fourth quarter of 2015, when the use of IEDs was at a peak. The reasons for this are unclear, but it could suggest a reduced access to explosive materials; reduced effectiveness against security targets, perhaps owing to better protected units; or successful efforts at countering IED production and destruction of stockpiles. The percentage change could also indicate greater access to, effectiveness, or desirability of firearms.

NOTABLE ATTACKS

The following section highlights notable terror attacks.

Islamic State-claimed attacks on Copts continue through first quarter

The attack on the St. Peter's and St. Paul's (Boutrosiya) Coptic Orthodox Church in Cairo on December 11, 2016, which killed 29 and wounded scores, and was claimed by the Islamic State in Egypt, ushered in a wave of attacks on Egypt's Coptic minority, including three attacks claimed in quarter one by Wilayat Sinai. On February 12, a [Coptic veterinarian](#) was shot in the head in front of his pharmacy in Arish. And then, in a separate incident, a [Christian resident](#) of the city's Samran neighborhood was killed that same day. On February 16, a [Coptic teacher](#) was fatally shot in Arish.

Four murders were widely attributed to Wilayat Sinai but were not claimed by the group. On January 30, a [Christian supermarket owner](#) in Arish was attacked and shot dead in his store by three masked gunmen. A [father and son](#) were executed on February 22, and a [Christian plumber](#) was killed in his Arish residence the following day.

The string of attacks and rumors of a hit list of Christian residents circulated by the Islamic State sparked an exodus of Christians from Arish, with dozens of families leaving for cities in the mainland, notably Ismailia.

Wilayat Sinai claims attacks on security checkpoints and patrols

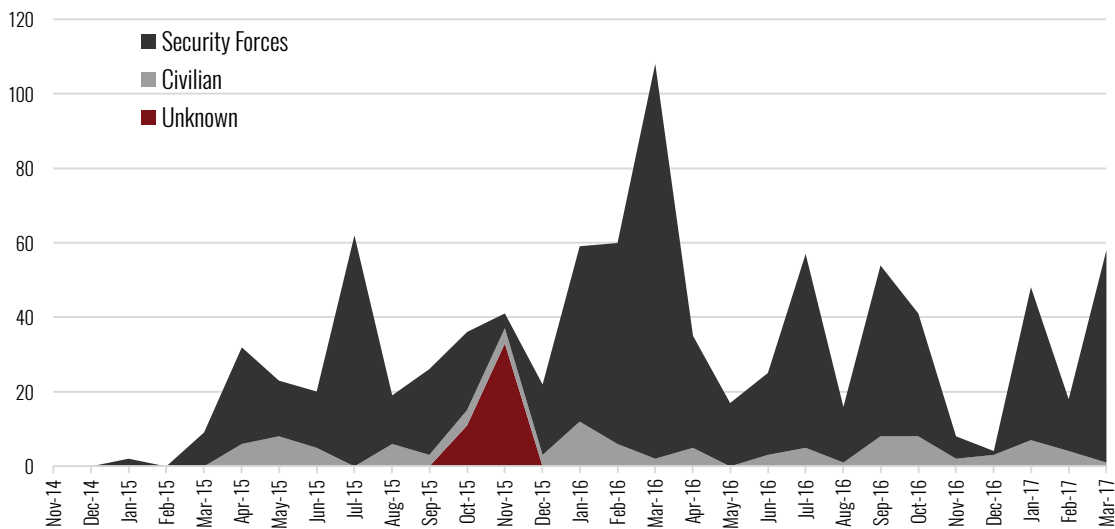
Wilayat Sinai, the Islamic State’s affiliate in Sinai, claimed 60 attacks throughout the first quarter, all of which were carried out in North Sinai province. This represents a slight uptick in attack levels from a low period between November and December.

Wilayat Sinai’s claimed attacks include:

- On **January 9**, the group **attacked** the Matafi checkpoint in Arish and killed seven police personnel and a civilian, and injured 12 others. The attack reportedly employed light arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and a car bomb, apparently made out of a garbage truck that had been stolen days earlier. Wilayat Sinai claimed a **second attack** carried out on the same day on a separate checkpoint in Mesaeed, which killed one policeman. The army **reinforced the locations** after the attacks.
- On **January 22**, Wilayat Sinai claimed an **attack on police personnel** near the village of Hasaka in central Sinai that killed five.
- On **February 4**, the group claimed responsibility for the death of four soldiers and the destruction of a military vehicle in the Jabal Kharam area of central Sinai.
- On **March 5**, Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for an attack in the Ibni Baytak area of south Arish that damaged two armored vehicles and, according to the group’s claim, killed four police officers.

Of its 60 reported attacks, Wilayat Sinai claimed 27 IED attacks, including one car bomb, and 25 shootings, targeting security personnel, alleged collaborators, and Coptic civilians. The claimed attacks left at least 81 security personnel and six civilians dead.⁴

**Casualties in Attacks Claimed by Wilayat Sinai
(Excluding Metrojet Disaster)**



⁴The six civilian fatalities include three Coptic Christians, whose deaths were officially claimed by Wilayat Sinai. Four other Coptic Christians were killed, but their deaths went unclaimed.

Gunmen carry out attack on New Valley checkpoint

On January 16, unidentified gunmen [attacked](#) a checkpoint in New Valley province, about 45 miles from the provincial capital, Kharga, killing eight and injuring three others. Security personnel reportedly killed two of the perpetrators. Attacks in New Valley are rarely reported, with only six in that province since July 2013. In 2014, 22 soldiers were killed in Farafra, also in New Valley, when gunmen stormed a checkpoint as the soldiers prepared to break their Ramadan fast.

Hassm claims two attacks in mainland

Hassm issued claims of responsibility for two attacks in the first quarter of 2017, bringing its total claimed activity from July 2016 through the end of March 2017 to 11 attacks:

- On **March 8**, Hassm claimed responsibility for assassinating a man in Damietta who had allegedly collaborated with the Egyptian police.
- On **March 25**, the group [claimed responsibility](#) for an IED attack that targeted police personnel in Qalyubia province, which the group alleges wounded five.

TERROR GROUP DEVELOPMENTS

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

The Islamic State's apparent strategic shift in Egypt

The Islamic State's increased targeting of Egyptian Christians and Christian institutions over the past two quarters represents a marked shift in the modus operandi of the organization and its affiliates in Egypt.

Following the suicide operation in December that killed 29 and wounded dozens at the St. Peter's and St. Paul's (Boutrosiya) Coptic Orthodox Church in Cairo, Wilayat Sinai—the Islamic State's Sinai affiliate—began a campaign of attacks against the Christian community in Arish in early 2017. In a video released in February by the Islamic State in Egypt, a narrator accuses Egypt's Christian minority of overestimating their size and of controlling some 40 percent of the Egyptian economy. Toward the end of the video, the suicide church bomber, whose nom de guerre is identified as Abu Abdullah al-Masri, appears and vows to “liberate Cairo” and free the prisoners of war.

Before the December church bombing, there was only one known attack on a Christian or Christian institution that was claimed by either of the Islamic State's affiliates in Egypt (the June 2016 killing of a Coptic priest outside Mar Girguis Church in North Sinai, which was claimed by Wilayat Sinai).

Wilayat Sinai promotes a focus on *hisbah* in media productions

On March 28, Wilayat Sinai released a new video dubbed “The Light of Sharia.” The video begins with an accusation against the government and its leaders for dragging the state into a period of *jahiliyah*, or ignorance, wrought with the use of alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes. The narrator denounced Muslim clerics, whom he referred to as servants of the government, for being complicit in the degradation of society. The video claimed that with the establishment of Wilayat Sinai, the “light of sharia” has begun to shine and return

society to a more righteous state. The application of *hisbah*, or the duty of the ruling government to maintain sharia, was depicted as the primary vehicle for correcting society's ills. Members of the *hisbah* police were shown rounding up and destroying quantities of alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, and televisions, and punishing those who sell or partake in the use of these substances or forms of entertainment. The video discussed what is labeled as the most important duty of Wilayat Sinai, which is the establishment of Islamic courts and the prosecution of *mushrikeen*, or idolaters and polytheists. Religious scholars of the Islamic State in the video instructed "transgressors" on Islamic doctrine, and the speaker warned that those who do not abide by proper doctrine are subject to punishment. The video ended with the November 2016 execution of two sheikhs, including the nearly 100-year-old Abu Hiraz, who were leading Sufi figures from among Sinai's Bedouin.

In an interview published earlier this quarter in an Islamic State-affiliated magazine, the emir of *hisbah* underscored all points made in the video, highlighting in particular the importance of fighting the use and smuggling of illicit substances like cannabis and opiates. He also described the group's efforts to curtail other immoral behavior, such as women not wearing the hijab, men allowing their clothing to fall below their ankles, the intermingling of sexes, and sinful enjoyment of music and television. In late February, members of the *hisbah* [stopped a bus](#) full of teachers in Rafah and threatened to punish them if they returned without a male relative or failing to wear a hijab. To enforce its rules—or to at least appear capable of doing so—and to disseminate propaganda, Wilayat Sinai reportedly sets up checkpoints in its areas of operation, though the duration, frequency, and size of these checkpoints is unclear. In the interview, the emir also touched on the execution of the two sheikhs, again describing Wilayat Sinai's primary endeavor as waging a "war against manifestations of *shirk* [polytheism] and *bid'ah* [innovation in religion], including Sufism, sorcery, soothsaying, and grave-worship." He discussed Wilayat Sinai's broader war on Sufi orders, mentioning the specific case of Abu Hiraz and his student, Qutayfan Burak Eid Mansour.

In early April, Wilayat Sinai [released](#) another propaganda video titled "Thunderbolts of the Hearts," which attempted to portray the relative strength of Wilayat Sinai compared to the Egyptian military, using nearly three dozen recorded shootings of military personnel. Egypt Security Watch's second quarterly report will cover this video in greater detail.

Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra release propaganda videos

After putting out teasers over this past quarter, in mid-January Hassm released its first propaganda video, titled "Kill Them," calling on the people of Egypt to continue the "resistance" against what Hassm describes as a "military occupation." The video included footage of its members undergoing firearm and explosives training in the desert, and then discussed in great depth the assassination attempts carried out by the group since it announced its existence in July. The video highlighted the group's ability to conduct preoperational surveillance on its targets, providing evidence with photographs of its targets' homes, cars, and personal information. The footage also emphasized Hassm's wide reach across Egypt, having conducted attacks in Cairo, Fayoum, Giza, Sixth of October City, Beni Suef, and elsewhere.

On March 27, Liwaa al-Thawra released a video titled "Knights of Paradise," which depicted its members undergoing basic training with firearms, rocket-propelled grenades, and hand grenades. The video also eulogized a number of the group's fallen fighters.

Hisham Ashmawy resurfaces with new video

On January 18, a video attributed to the self-proclaimed emir of al-Morabitoun⁵, Hisham Ashmawy, was released through an associated media channel. This is Ashmawy's fourth video to date, with the first video released in March 2016 and two others in June and July 2016. Ashmawy, a former special forces officer in the Egyptian army and an al-Qaeda loyalist who was part of the Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis network until the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, is accused of carrying out a number of high-profile attacks in Egypt. Ashmawy has been accused of involvement in the attempted assassination of Interior Minister [Muhammad Ibrahim](#) in May 2013 and the assassination of Prosecutor-General Hisham Barakat in June 2015. In the most recent video, which is directed at the Egyptian public, Ashmawy stated that the problems facing the ummah have been caused by the people's sins. He discussed the need for an Islamic revolution, which he claims can be brought on by repentance.

⁵ Ashmawy's group is likely distinct from the group led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, which carries the same name.

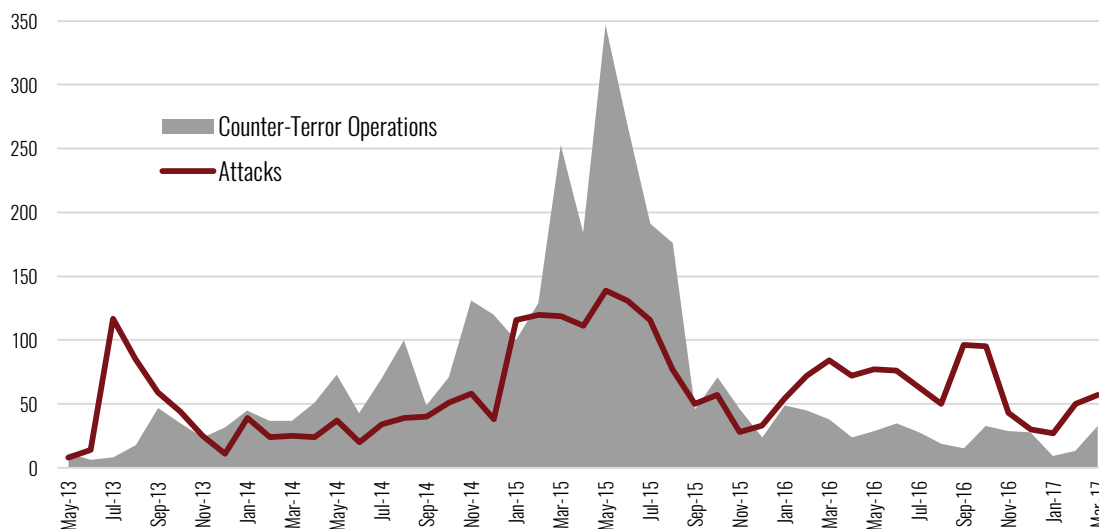
COUNTER-TERRORISM

TRENDS

Reported counter-terror operations decrease

Reported counter-terror activity decreased in the first quarter of 2017, with 55 operations reported, compared to 90 operations last quarter and 62 operations in the third quarter of last year. For comparison, the same period a year ago saw 132 reported operations, representing a 58 percent year-over-year drop.

**Reported Counter-Terror Operations across Egypt
(Compared to Attacks across Egypt)**



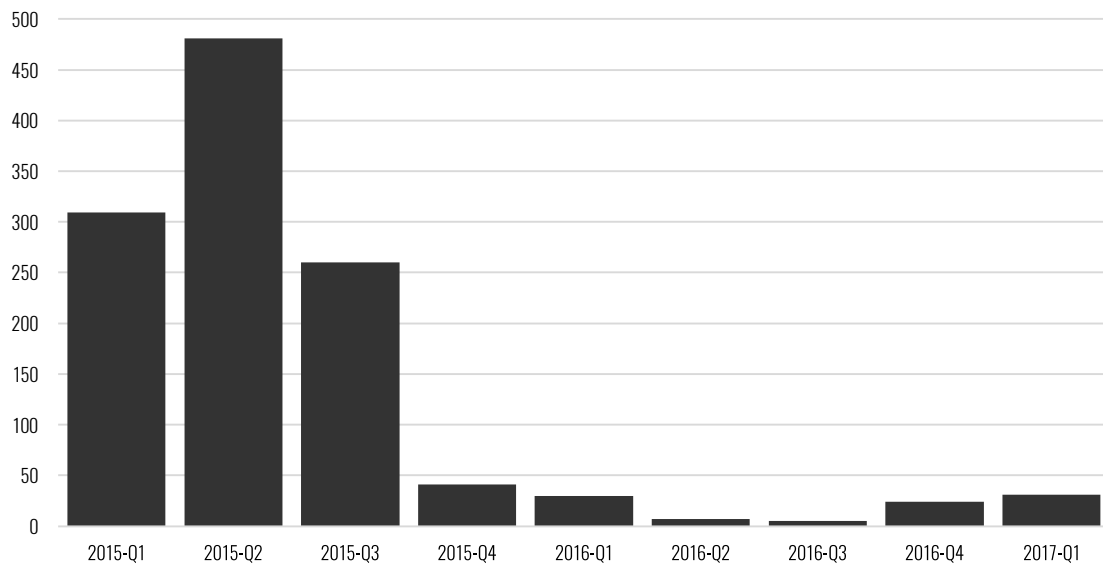
Of the 55 total reported counter-terror operations in the first quarter, 45 were reported in North Sinai, representing 82 percent of reported counter-terror activity. The remaining operations were carried out in eight other provinces, including Alexandria, Cairo, Fayoum, Gharbia, Giza, Monofeya, Minya, and Suez.

The drop in reported counter-terror operations in 2015, as reflected in the chart above, notably followed the introduction in July 2015 of a controversial counter-terror law that penalized reporting of statistics that contradicted the state line. This apparent drop could reflect either reduced access to information to these operations by journalists or a general unwillingness to report on them, which could in turn skew the data.

Officially reported counter-terror operations increase

Counter-terror operations directly reported by the Ministries of Interior and Defense increased in the first quarter, rising from 24 operations in the fourth quarter to 31 operations this quarter, representing a 29 percent increase in officially reported activity. For comparison, the same period a year ago saw a similar level of activity, at 30 officially reported operations. The increase this quarter represents an upward trend in officially reported activity which began in the third quarter of 2016.

Official Reports of Counter-Terror Operations

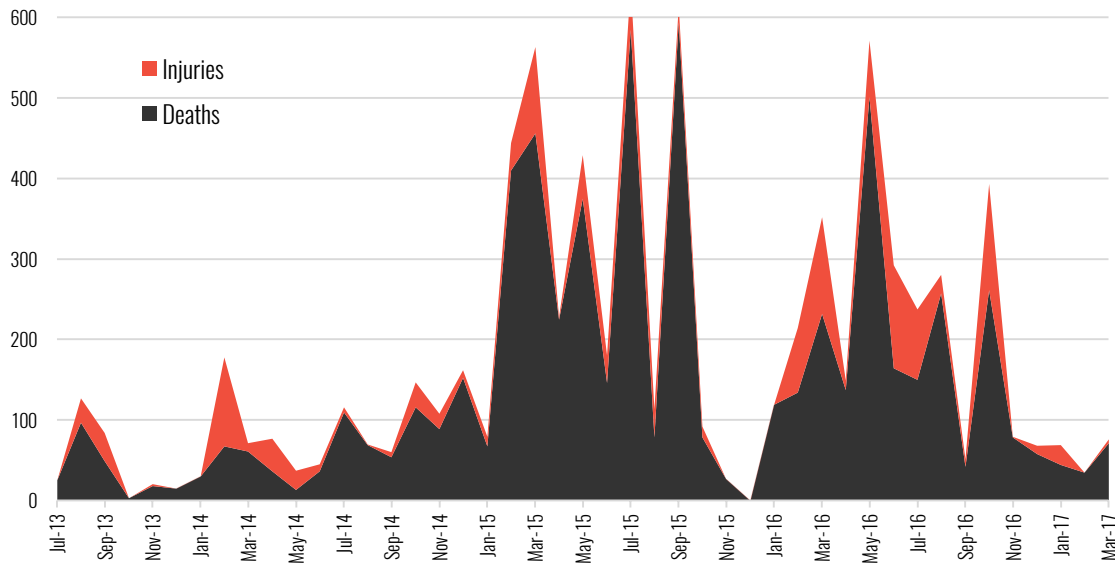


Of the 31 officially reported counter-terror operations, 26 came from the Ministry of Defense and five came from the Ministry of Interior.

Decrease in both reported and official death counts in counter-terror operations across Egypt

The number of reported deaths in counter-terror operations across Egypt decreased from 397 in the fourth quarter of 2017 to 150 this quarter, representing a 62 percent decrease. Officially reported deaths decreased over the same period, from 164 in the fourth quarter to 131 in the first quarter. Ninety-seven percent of officially reported fatalities were reported for counter-terror operations that took place in North Sinai province.

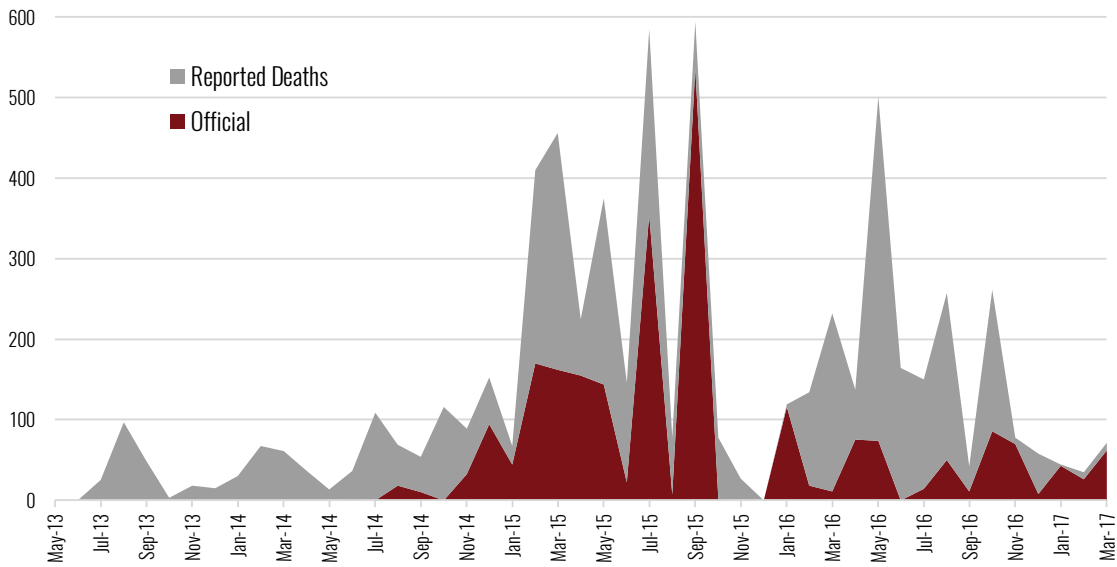
Reported Casualties in Counter-Terror Operations across Egypt



Major General Muhammad Farag al-Shehat, Egypt’s Director of Military Intelligence and Reconnaissance,⁶ [said during a statement](#) at the “Counter-Terrorism: A Nation’s Will” seminar this quarter that the military had killed nearly 500 militants in the Sinai Peninsula as part of Operation Martyr’s Right, which was launched in September 2015. While it is unclear which casualties the military considers part of Operation Martyr’s Right, there have been 1,155 deaths officially reported in counter-terror operations in Sinai since the commencement of that operation, through the end of the first quarter.

⁶ Immediately prior to being appointed director of military intelligence, Shehat was the commander of Egypt’s Second Field Army, which operates in North Sinai. He had previously served as an assistant director of military intelligence under then-Lieutenant General Abdel-Fattah El Sisi, and in a variety of roles in the Second Field Army and its subordinate units.

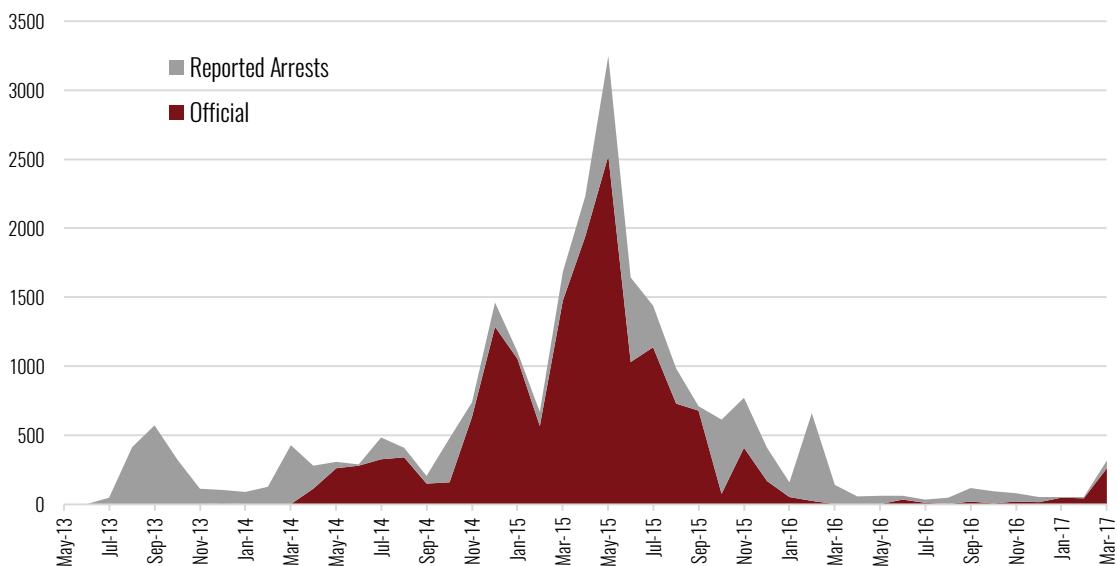
Reported Deaths in Counter-Terror Operations Throughout Egypt



Reported arrest counts from counter-terror operations across Egypt increase

The number of reported arrests in counter-terror operations across Egypt increased from 225 in the fourth quarter of 2016 to 419 this quarter. Ninety percent of these 419 arrests, or 379, were in operations conducted in the Sinai Peninsula. The number of officially reported arrests nationwide also grew, from 40 arrests in the fourth quarter to 353 this quarter—nearly nine times as many. Ninety-four percent of arrests officially reported in the first quarter were carried out in counter-terror operations reported in Sinai. Reports of arrests across Egypt in counter-terror operations peaked between December 2014 and September 2015, during which some 14,465 arrests were reported, of which 11,729 were reported in operations announced by state bodies.

Reported Arrests in Counter-Terror Operations Throughout Egypt



NOTABLE OPERATIONS

The following section details notable domestic security operations.

Security operations target Sinai militants

The Ministries of Interior and Defense reported a number of notable counter-terror operations in the Sinai Peninsula this quarter. Among the operations were:

- On January 13, the Ministry of Interior **reported** a **raid** in which security forces killed 10 terror suspects. They had allegedly been behind an **attack on a checkpoint** days before that killed seven policemen and one civilian. (The implications of this security operation are discussed below.)
- On January 15, the interior ministry **claimed** to have **killed** a senior figure in Wilayat Sinai, Hamdan Suleiman Salam Hussein, during a security raid on his home. (Reports citing an unnamed journalist notably surfaced a month later, claiming that someone with a similar name and credentials was killed by the Third Field Army during a counter-terror operation on February 8.)
- On January 29, the Second Field Army **announced** that it had carried out a five-day security sweep in Sinai against the Islamic State, destroying 28 militant residences, two car bombs, six four-wheel-drive vehicles, and three motorcycles, and searched for other residences and tunnels used by the militants. One militant was killed and 24 were arrested. The Third Field Army also claimed that it had killed 19 militants, injured seven, and arrested 12 in central Sinai around the same time.
- On March 26, the Second Field Army **reportedly** killed five members of Wilayat Sinai during a security operation in North Sinai. The statement alleged that one of those killed was a leader of the organization. Sixteen others were reportedly arrested during that operation.

Operations against Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra

Two operations explicitly targeting Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra were reported in the first quarter of 2017. The counter-terror operations include:

- On January 5, security personnel from the interior ministry **reportedly killed** an alleged member of Hassm and arrested three others during a raid in the suburbs of Cairo. The men were connected to an attack in Cairo on December 9, 2016, which killed six policemen.
- On March 8, security personnel from the interior ministry **killed an** al-Azhar student and alleged member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan Muhammad Galal Mustafa, in what was described as a shootout that was initiated by Mustafa during the course of a security raid in Ismailia. Mustafa was reportedly wanted in a case that involves both Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra. (Three days later, Liwaa al-Thawra released a martyrdom announcement for Mustafa and three others: Ahmed Mahfouz, Ragab Ahmed Ali, and Abdullah Helal, all students at al-Azhar. The men were ostensibly **killed during the security raids** in Ismailia and **Giza**, the latter of which was reportedly targeting members of the Islamic State in Egypt.)

SECURITY SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS

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

High-level military shuffle, promotions

Following the reappointments of the naval and air defense commanders last quarter, the military notably [promoted](#) Colonel Tamer al-Refaie as the new spokesman for the armed forces. Refaie, who previously served as an information analyst in military intelligence, replaced Brigadier General Muhammad Samir who joined Sherry Media Company as chairman of the board of directors. President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi also promoted the commander of the Republican Guard, Ahmed Zaki, to the [rank of lieutenant general](#).

Ministry of Interior reassignments

More than 100 mid-level officials and 11 assistant deputy ministers in the Ministry of Interior were [reassigned](#). The ministry [also announced](#) the formation of committees to evaluate police ethics, behavior, and psychological condition.

Noncommissioned police officers strike over vacation time

Noncommissioned police officers at South Sinai police stations reportedly went on strike in January because of a five-day [decrease in vacation time](#) as laid out in a ministerial resolution issued earlier that week. The next day, the South Sinai security director [said](#) that the crisis was over, following an investigation into 150 low-ranking policemen and the relocation of 50, while a decision was pending for 37 others. (Seventeen of these men were later [sentenced](#) in June 2017 to five years in prison for staging the strikes.)

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.

Notable terrorism cases

The first quarter had a number of notable developments in terrorism-related cases, including:

- On January 1, a military court in Upper Egypt's Assiut sentenced 175 people to life in prison on charges of committing violence and raiding Minya's Mallawi museum in 2013 and issued varying sentences for 42 other defendants. The defendants were arrested in 2013 at sit-ins demanding the reinstatement of ousted President Muhammad Morsi.
- On January 10, Egypt's military prosecutor referred 176 individuals accused of involvement in Wilayat Sinai to military court, accusing them of espionage and belonging to an illegal group that aims to obstruct state institutions. The investigation indicated that the defendants planned to attack 10 churches in Cairo and Giza in addition to targeting public figures.
- On January 18, 304 members of Hassm were referred to military prosecution in one of the court's largest cases. The group, however, was not designated a terror organization until mid-February.
- On January 18, Cairo Sixth Circuit Court listed 1,538 individuals as terrorists, banning them from traveling, freezing their assets, denying them their political rights, and canceling their passports. The defendants included leading figures from the Muslim Brotherhood and their families, young activists, and public figures.

Courts designate Hassm, Popular Resistance Movement as terror organizations

[Abdeen Summary Proceedings Court](#) and the [Cairo Court for Urgent Matters](#) banned Hassm and designated it as a terrorist organization for committing acts of terror and attempting to assassinate the assistant prosecutor-general and a former grand mufti. The Cairo Court for Urgent Matters also [banned](#) the Popular Resistance Movement as a terror organization, although it has not claimed any attacks since August 2016.

Emergency law extended for North Sinai

President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi issued [Decree 56](#) in January, extending the state of emergency in areas of North Sinai for an additional three months. The House of Representatives [approved](#) the extension on January 23. Some areas of North Sinai have been under emergency law since October 25, 2014. The law, which affects the area west of Rafah to al-Awga, east of Arish, and [imposes a curfew](#) between 7:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., had last been extended in October.

New security measures implemented in North, South Sinai

In addition to the emergency law extension, the Cabinet also [announced](#) its decision to ban motorcycles in Arish, Sheikh Zuweid, and Rafah, as well as in the Mughara Mountains, Khatmeya Mountains, Sadr al-Hitan, Ras Sidr, and parts of Taba. In response, a number of people gathered in front of Representative Rahmy Bakir's home, [demanding rescission](#) of the decision, citing their reliance on motorcycles for work, doctor visits, and other basic needs.

The South Sinai Security Directorate likewise [increased](#) security measures for tourists visiting Sinai. Travelers, meaning those without Sinai addresses on their identification cards who are entering Sinai [through the Ahmed Hamdy Tunnel](#), are now required to present hotel bookings at security checkpoints to enter the province; those who have no confirmation will be denied entry.

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.

Omar Abdel Rahman, the “blind sheikh,” dies in U.S. prison

Omar Abdel Rahman, the leader of the Gama'a al-Islamiya known as the “blind sheikh,” [died in a federal prison](#) in the United States, after more than 20 years behind bars. Abdel Rahman was convicted in 1995 on charges of seditious conspiracy for his role in planning a series of terror attacks in New York City that never materialized. More than 2,000 people attended his funeral in Gamaliya, his village in Egypt, and a number of groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda, reportedly [released statements](#) mourning his death.

Concerns over extrajudicial killings spark upheaval

In January, the Ministry of Interior [announced](#) the killing of 10 alleged terrorists accused of taking part in the attacks on Matafi and Masaeed checkpoints, which took place four days earlier and were claimed by Wilayat Sinai. After the announcement in January, residents of Arish claimed that the men [had been detained by security forces](#) in 2016 and their whereabouts had been unknown. In response, members of several tribes announced that they would launch a partial civil strike, demanding, [among other things](#), a fair investigation into the incident, resignation of Sinai representatives in parliament, repatriation of the men's bodies, and the release of individuals who were being held without charges. The residents also announced formation of a committee to monitor fulfillment of their demands. Those calling for the strike said that they would refuse to pay electricity and water bills starting on February 11 and that they would hold a second meeting on February 25 to discuss escalation, if necessary. Members of parliament from Sinai reportedly [asked](#) for a suspension of the strike; one representative said that he would resign if the demands were not met. In a statement released on February 26, the committee said that “hundreds” of detained persons had been released. These events notably preceded a video leaked in April that portrayed an [extrajudicial killing](#) perpetrated by a tribal militia believed to be backed by the military.

Egypt repatriates the remains of French nationals recovered from the flight MS-804 disaster

On January 1, Egypt [began transferring](#) the remains of French nationals recovered from Flight MS-804 operated by EgyptAir, which went down in the Mediterranean Sea last May. Egypt announced shortly before the repatriation, in December 2016, that investigators had [found traces of explosives](#) on the bodies of passengers. Cairo's findings contradict those of French investigators, who in 2017 concluded that there was [no explosive residue](#) on passengers' remains (though, in September, French investigators reportedly [found traces of explosives](#) on the wreckage but were prevented from examining it). While responses to the crash have been mixed, Egypt's handling of the MS-804 incident contrasts markedly with that of the Wilayat Sinai-claimed downing of flight KG-9268 in October 2015. Despite the consensus of many foreign intelligence services and governments and a claim of responsibility, the Egyptian government has refused to acknowledge the 2015 crash as a terror attack. The economic ramifications of that attack are still felt in Egypt, with Russian-Egyptian negotiations on the resumption of flights between the two countries still ongoing.

U.S.-Egyptian bilateral security cooperation continues

A number of visits this quarter by U.S. officials focused on bilateral security and military cooperation. The delegations included:

- Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) led a [congressional delegation](#) that included Juan Vargas (D-CA), J. Luis Correa (D-CA), Andy Harris (R-MD), French Hill (R-AR), Robert Pittenger (R-NC), and Steve King (R-IA). The delegation held meetings with President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, and senior Egyptian government, business, and community leaders.
- The Transportation Security Administration [conducted](#) one of its biannual security inspections of Egyptian flights to New York. The delegation met with the chairman of EgyptAir Holding Company, Safwat Mesallam, and praised Egypt's security measures.
- CENTCOM Commander General Joseph Votel [led a military delegation](#) to Cairo in February. The delegation met with Sisi, Defense Minister General Sedki Sobhi, and the Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces Lieutenant General Mahmoud Hegazi. Votel reportedly told his hosts that the U.S. would like to reinstate the bilateral Bright Star military exercises, which were last carried out in 2013.
- Army Central Commander Lieutenant General Michael Garrett [led a delegation](#) to Cairo in March. The delegation met with Hegazi, discussing mutual military cooperation and bilateral relations.

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 the 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 carried out for political ends. This does not include the threat of attack, but rather only executed 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 (although these were documented in [TIMEP's Eshhad project](#)).

Likewise, "counter-terror operation" is ill-defined, particularly as many government actions (especially 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 its 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.

TIMEP's quarterly reports use unique data to offer 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.

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