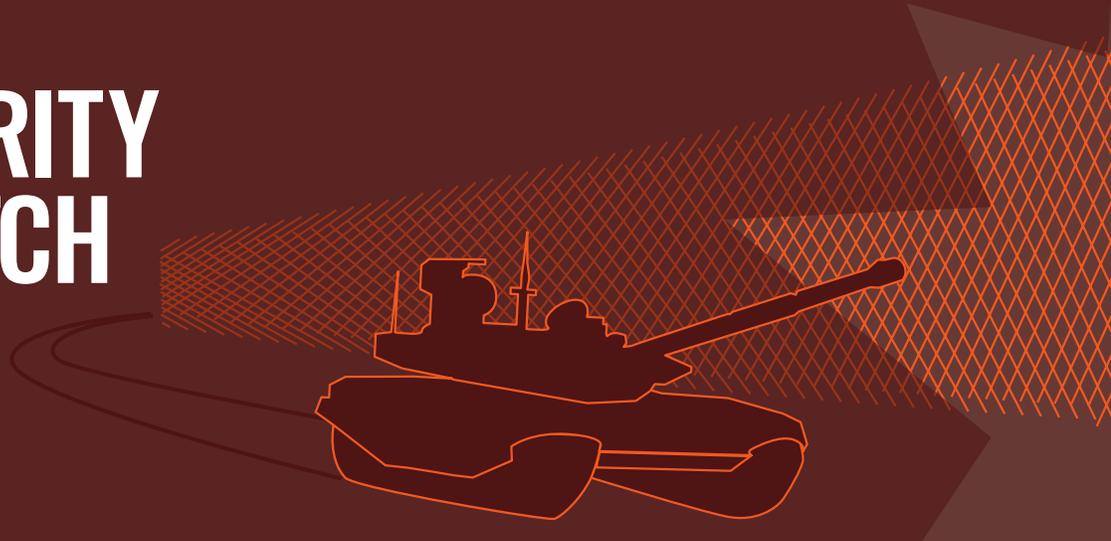




EGYPT SECURITY WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF FEBRUARY 9-15, 2019

Summary

- Egyptian Defense Minister General Muhammad Zaki met with US CENTCOM Commander General Joseph Votel in Cairo.
- A Hamas officer died after Egyptian security forces pumped toxic gas into a smuggling tunnel. An emergency responder was killed during the rescue attempt.
- Wilayat Sinai claimed four attacks throughout North Sinai.
- Twitter reports of counterterrorism raid said that Egyptian security forces dismantled a Wilayat Sinai weapons depot in the village of Balaa near Rafah.

Egypt's Defense Minister Meets CENTCOM Commander

On February 11, U.S. CENTCOM Commander General Joseph Votel met with Egyptians Defense Minister General Muhammad Zaki in Cairo. The Egyptian Armed Forces chief of staff, Lieutenant General Muhammad Farid Hegazy, also met with the delegation. The parties discussed security cooperation and regional developments. During the visit, Votel updated the press on Operation Inherent Resolve's progress.

Hamas Officer Dies as Egypt Continues Gaza Tunnel Policing

On February 11, Abdel Hamid al-Aker, a Hamas officer, died when Egyptian security forces closed a smuggling tunnel into North Sinai from Gaza by pumping toxic gas into the space. An emergency responder, Sobhi Abu Qarshin, died during the rescue attempt. Smuggling tunnels to and from Gaza have fueled both Hamas and Wilayat Sinai operations. A similar event caused the deaths of three Palestinians in February 2017. The incident has not appeared to complicate Egyptian efforts to mediate Palestinian reconciliation, as Ismail Haniyeh's meeting in Egypt with Mahmoud Abbas proceeded as scheduled.

Wilayat Sinai Claims Four Operations in North Sinai

Wilayat Sinai claimed three operations in Rafah and one operation in Arish over the past week. On February 10, Wilayat Sinai claimed a dual improvised explosive device (IED) attack near the Arish airport. On February 12, the group claimed two sniper attacks near Rafah, which resulted in four Egyptian security casualties. In the fourth attack, on February 14, Wilayat Sinai destroyed a military bulldozer with an IED. The attacks represent Wilayat Sinai's first claimed operations this month, signaling the group's persistent capabilities among Egypt's sustained counter-terrorism efforts.

Reports Say Wilayat Sinai Weapons Depot Destroyed

A Twitter source reported that the Egyptian armed forces dismantled a Wilayat Sinai warehouse, based on a tip from military intelligence on February 10. The raid reportedly occurred in the village of Balaa, outside Rafah, and represents the first report of a counter-terror operation in North Sinai since a January 20 raid in Arish was reported by the Associated Press. No other reporting on the incident could be found.



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EGYPT
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Egypt Security Watch provides the most comprehensive available resource to monitor Egypt's security situation, with a dataset that includes all instances of violence and state operations, state actor and terror group profiles, and expert analyses.