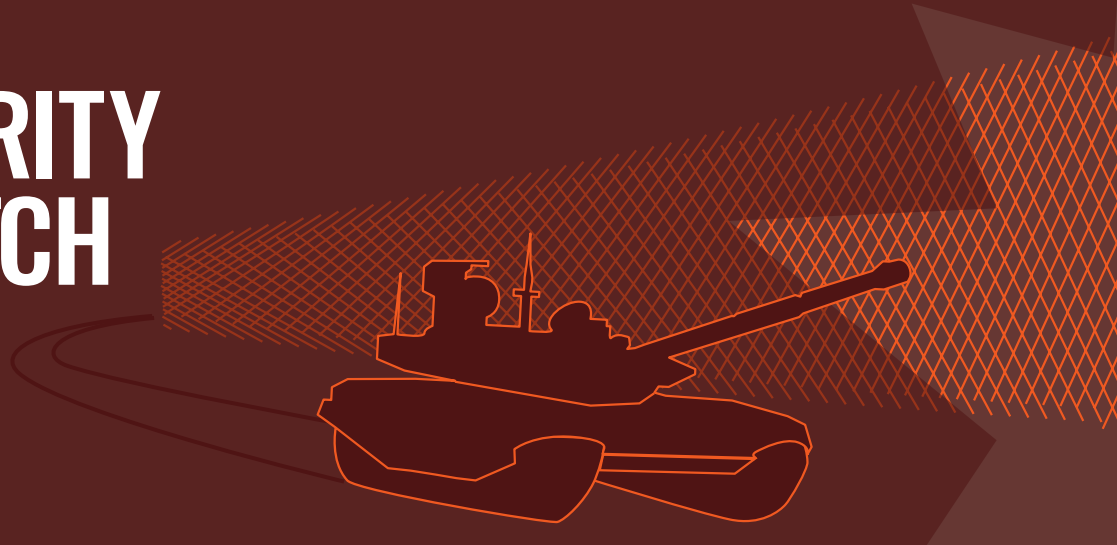




EGYPT SECURITY WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF FEBRUARY 23–MARCH 1, 2019

Summary

- Egypt agreed to release four members of Hamas’ military wing, who had been abducted at gunpoint by masked men in Egypt in 2015.
- Egypt’s Court of Cassation ruled that a residential search may occur in cases that involve “spreading ideas that incite against the regime.”
- On February 24, Wilayat Sinai claimed an attack on a military vehicle near Rafah.

Egypt Releases Hamas Militants

In an attempt to deescalate tensions between Hamas and Israel, Egypt released four members of Hamas’ military wing, Qassam Brigades, who were in Egyptian custody after their abduction by masked men in Egypt in 2015. According to Mada Masr, the two sides agreed that the kidnapping would be attributed to militants from Wilayat Sinai. On February 28, Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas’ Political Bureau, thanked Egyptian leadership as he concluded a three-week visit to Cairo.

Since 2017, Egypt has sought to mediate reconciliation talks between Fatah, the Palestinian Authority’s ruling party, and Hamas. Although an original 2017 reconciliation agreement failed on implementation, Egyptian officials have continued efforts by inviting Fatah and Hamas to enter into negotiations again, which began in July 2018 and have remained active.

Residential Search Powers Expanded in Counterterrorism Law Ruling

The Court of Cassation ruled that residential searches of dissidents were permitted with the consent of the property owner. Previously, authorization to conduct such searches was obtained through the prosecutor-general. The ruling was made under the 2015 Counter-terrorism Law, which broadly defines key counter-terrorism concepts. The amendment also stipulates that property owners are required to register a new lease agreement with their local police station documenting the new occupant's national identification card or foreign identification within 72 hours of the lease agreement.

Twitter Report Says Airstrikes Continue in North Sinai

Airstrikes were reported near Arish Cement Factory and Bir Gifgafa village in central Sinai. The Egyptian Air Force intensified its campaign in Sinai, following last week's Wilayat Sinai raid on Arish's Gouda-3 checkpoint, which reportedly resulted in 15 casualties. More systematic reports on the use of Egyptian airpower are typically disclosed in military spokesperson updates, the latest of which was issued on February 20.

Wilayat Sinai Claims Single Attack Near Rafah

Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for an improvised explosive device (IED) attack on a military vehicle near Rafah, marking 15 such attacks by the group so far in 2019. The group has claimed responsibility for 27 total operations this year, 15 of which were reported in Rafah. Wilayat Sinai has claimed responsibility for killing 29 members of Egypt's security forces in terrorist attacks this year.



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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.