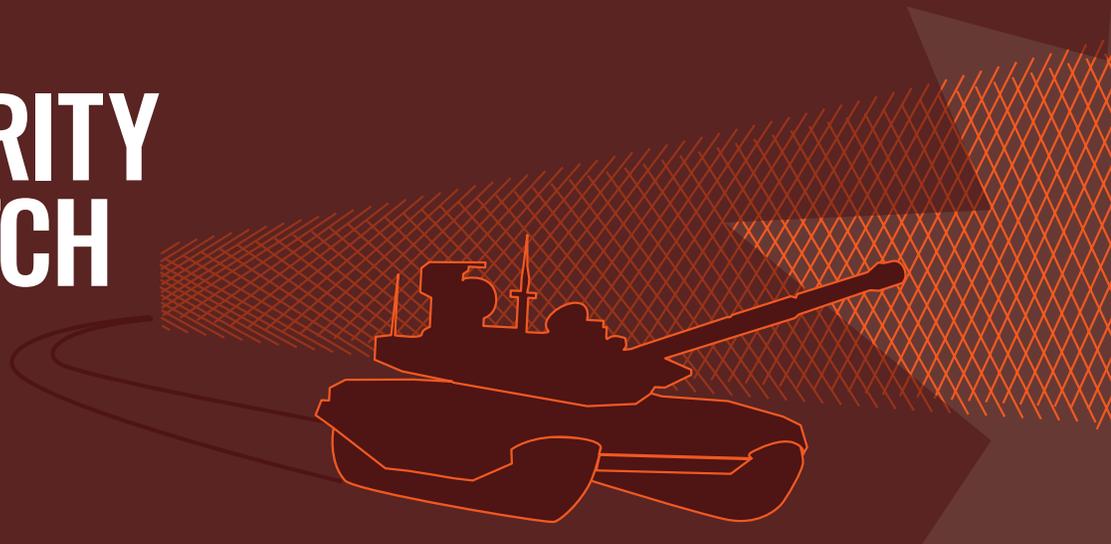




EGYPT SECURITY WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF APRIL 20–26, 2019

Summary

- Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for an improvised explosive device (IED) attack targeting pro-government tribal elements in Rafah and an IED attack in Arish targeting soldiers.
- On April 21, five people were kidnapped and released by militants in Rawda. No group has claimed responsibility for the incident.
- A new state of emergency was announced in Egypt. Egypt has been under a nationwide state of emergency nearly continuously since 2017.

Wilayat Sinai Claims Two Attacks in North Sinai

Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in Rafah's al-Ajrah neighborhood. The IED attack was the first claimed operation to target tribal elements in North Sinai since the Islamic State's al-Naba newsletter reported an operation targeting tribesmen near Rafah in late January. Over the past 12 months, six attacks have killed or wounded those alleged to be tribal collaborators. Tribesmen, often referred to as *sahwa* or "awakening" in Islamic State media, have at times played a direct role in combating Wilayat Sinai, especially following the 2017 Rawda mosque attack. They have proven to be effective local intelligence gatherers and force multipliers for the state, though concerns about their integration and plans for disarmament remain.

On April 21, the same day as the attack and Wilayat Sinai's claim, the Sinai Tribes Union eulogized one of the fighters killed in the operation on its Facebook page. According to Mada Masr, Ahmed Ayed Abu Anqa was the third fighter to be killed by a recent attack. Three other tribal militiamen were killed in a late March landmine explosion and another fighter, Abdullah Shtawi Ibn Jarmi, was killed by another mine on the outskirts of Tarabin territory in North Sinai. The Sinai Tribes Union is an unofficial coordinating body for Sinai's tribes that has been active since 2015, when it issued 11 counter-terrorism recommendations to Cairo. The Union is active on social media, operating a prolific Twitter account and Facebook page.

On April 25, Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for an IED attack near the International Road west of Arish which killed and injured Egyptian soldiers as they attempted to dismantle the device. The attack brings Wilayat Sinai's monthly reported attack total to 12. In the first three months of 2019, Wilayat Sinai claimed 20, 13, and seven attacks respectively.

Five Kidnapped in Rawda, Released Hours Later

Local sources reported to Mada Masr that gunmen kidnapped five people near the village of Rawda, Saturday, April 20, releasing them hours later. It is unclear why the militants released the prisoners taken from Rawda and though Wilayat Sinai is believed to be the perpetrator, no group has issued a claim of responsibility. Similarly, the November 2017 Rawda mosque attack—which killed 311, the deadliest terror attack in Egypt's history—is widely believed to have been the work of Wilayat Sinai, but the group never issued a claim of responsibility.

The last widely reported kidnapping in North Sinai came in January, when militants forced police forensics expert Adib Nakhla from his car at a checkpoint. The incident was later claimed by Wilayat Sinai in the Islamic State's al-Naba newsletter. Nakhla likely faces execution, as police were unsuccessful at recovering him in a clash at the checkpoint, which killed a militant and resulted in the injury of two conscripts.

Nationwide State of Emergency Extended for Another Three Months

On April 23, a new three-month state of emergency declaration appeared in Egypt's Official Gazette. The 2014 constitution stipulates that states of emergency can only be declared for three months and are eligible for one extension. The state has circumvented these restrictions, however, by allowing states of emergency to lapse for brief periods, before introducing identical measures to reestablish their effects. This tactic has been used in a nationwide state of emergency since April 2017, which was declared in the wake of the Palm Sunday church bombings. Additionally, partial states of emergency with various restrictions have been in place in North Sinai dating back to October 2014, when a series of attacks targeted the Karm al-Quwadees checkpoint near Sheikh Zuweid.



The Tahrir Institute
for Middle East Policy

1140 Connecticut Ave NW Suite 505
Washington, DC 20036
office 202 969 3343
fax 202 480 2178
timep.org

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