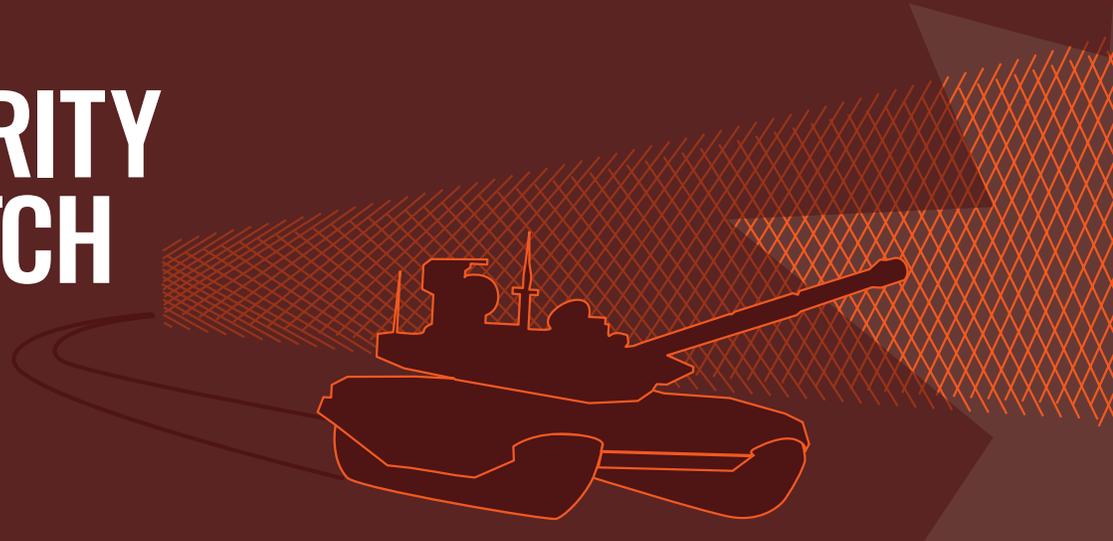




EGYPT SECURITY WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF APRIL 13-19, 2019

Summary

- Security forces placed Arish on lockdown after intelligence reports indicated that militants had infiltrated the city center.
- Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for an April 12 suicide operation which reportedly killed two militants and wounded three police forces. The Islamic State's al-Naba magazine later claimed that one of the militants was from the Caucasus.
- In addition to the claim of the April 12 attack, Wilayat Sinai claimed three operations over the period.
- No injuries were reported after militants ambushed the El Nasr Salines Company in Arish. No group has claimed responsibility for the operation.
- A Twitter source said that Egyptian drones conducted over 30 strikes south of Sheikh Zuweid and west of Rafah, targeting Wilayat Sinai.

Security Forces Place Arish Under Lockdown

Mada Masr reported that on April 15 security services demanded that business owners close their stores in the al-Masaid neighborhood of Arish. According to local sources cited by Mada Masr, similar measures were adopted throughout the city after security forces learned that militants had infiltrated downtown Arish and planned to conduct an operation similar to the April 9 Sheikh Zuweid market bombing. Businesses were permitted to reopen the next day, though freedom of movement within the city is still reportedly somewhat restricted.

Eighty of the 211 attacks (about 38 percent) reported since April 2018 have been located in or around Arish, North Sinai's largest city. The city's civilian population has been seldom targeted by Wilayat Sinai, however, as seven civilian fatalities have been reported in Wilayat Sinai's Arish operations over the past year, compared to 65 fatalities among the security forces. Through the first three-and-a-half months of 2019, there have been two terror attacks in which the combined civilian fatalities and injuries exceeded combined security fatalities and injuries. Only three attacks met that criteria throughout all of 2018.

Wilayat Sinai Claims April 12 Ras Sedr Attack, One Perpetrator a Foreign Fighter

Earlier reports had placed the attack in Ayoun Moussa, in the Suez governorate, and said the operation resulted in three militant casualties. Wilayat Sinai's account said the operation was conducted near Ras Sedr in South Sinai and involved two perpetrators. (The Suez governorate extends slightly into the Sinai Peninsula; Ayoun Moussa and Ras Sedr are about 20 miles apart.) South Sinai has experienced significantly less violence than its northern counterpart. The last attack to be reported in the province was in January 2017, when two militants attacked two Egyptian Army checkpoints near Taba. South Sinai's legacy as a popular destination has attracted foreign investment and seen a resurgence in tourism, though a deteriorating security situation could stand to undermine these developments.

One of the militants killed in the attack, identified by Wilayat Sinai as Abu Muhammad al-Muhajir, is reportedly from the Caucasus. North Sinai has been an alternative destination for prospective foreign fighters who could not join militant groups in Iraq or Syria, due to its isolated location and the heavy military presence there (compared to Libya, for instance). Though the al-Muhajir *kunya*—a *nomme de guerre* meaning “traveler”—is relatively common in reporting from North Sinai, the term most often refers to Gazans and militants from the Egyptian mainland. Yet, there have been a few reports of global, as opposed to regional, foreign fighters. In February, the Islamic State's al-Naba newsletter eulogized a Dagestani fighter killed in an airstrike, and in January two Germans were deported on the suspicion that they were attempting to enter the conflict zone in North Sinai.

Wilayat Sinai Claims Three New Operations

Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for three improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in North Sinai this week. On April 13, an IED damaged a military vehicle near Sheikh Zuweid. On April 15, two separate IED attacks targeted a police vehicle and an M60 tank in Arish. The three operations bring Wilayat Sinai's April monthly attack total to 10.

Unclaimed Raid of Salt Company Does Not Result in Casualties

Mada Masr, citing local sources, reported that militants ambushed the El Nasr Salines Company in west Arish and targeted workers from Rawda. The report said that no casualties were sustained, as the staff fled by microbus. Rawda was the site of the infamous November 2017 mosque bombing, which killed 305. Though workers on government-backed development projects and their security escorts have been targeted, private businesses have lately been a rare target for militant groups in Egypt. The most recent commercial enterprise to be targeted in a terrorist attack was reported in June 2016, when an engineer was killed and several other workers were wounded after militants fired on employees at the Sinai Cement plant south of Arish.

More Airstrikes Reported in North Sinai

A Twitter source reported that the Egyptian Air Force conducted over 30 airstrikes southwest of Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah on April 16. Counter-terror air operations are less widely reported than their ground-based counterparts. Other independent accounts observed similar displays of airpower in late March and February. The military spokesperson most recently provided official updates to Egypt's counter-terrorism campaign in January.



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