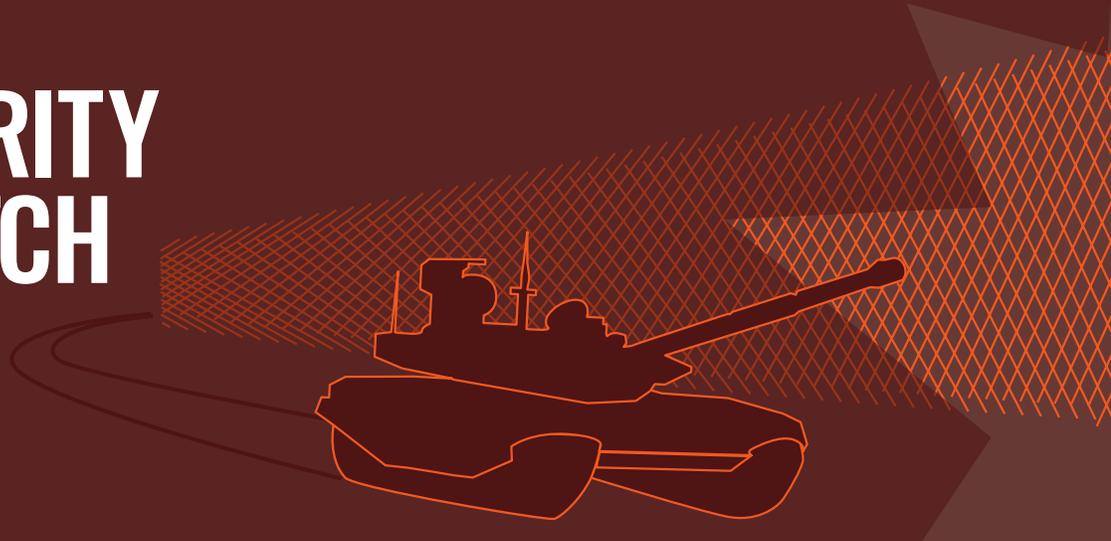




EGYPT SECURITY WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF JUNE 21–27, 2019

Summary

- Wilayat Sinai claimed five attacks on various targets throughout North Sinai, bringing the monthly total for June to 20 attacks reported to date. Reports on the attacks indicated at least five civilians and 16 members of the security forces were killed, making June 2019 the deadliest month in North Sinai since September 2017.
- The Egyptian Ministry of Interior announced a series of counter-terrorism raids in a statement on Tuesday, claiming it had foiled a plot to “bring down the state.” All those arrested, however, were peaceful political activists, lawyers, or journalists.
- Hisham Ashmawy, a former military officer and leader of the Wilayat Sinai precursor Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, is being retried in Egyptian military court on charges related to various terrorist attacks following his transfer from Libya into Egyptian custody.
- Nicaragua detained two Egyptian nationals on the suspicion that they are members of the Islamic State; very few details have been provided on the origin of the suspicion or their alleged links to the organization.
- Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Defense Minister Lieutenant General Muhammad Ahmed Zaki met with their counterparts in Moscow for planned meetings to discuss strengthening security and military ties.
- Interior Minister Mahmoud Tawfiq met China’s Deputy Minister of Public Security Ministry Zao Ganlo in Egypt.

Wilayat Sinai claimed five attacks on various targets in North Sinai

Wilayat Sinai claimed an attack on civilian workers constructing fortifications at the Arish airport. The attack claim issued by the Islamic State described the attack as having killed 10 civilian workers. Egyptian officials speaking to the Associated Press **claimed** the attack killed four workers and injured five, while the attackers burned two vehicles at the work site.

Wilayat Sinai claimed multiple coordinated assaults on Egyptian Ministry of Interior checkpoints throughout Arish on June 25 and 26, with reports indicating that 16 policemen were killed and 18 injured, and at least one civilian was reportedly killed in the crossfire. The group claimed the attacks occurred at various checkpoints throughout the city using a combination of small arms and suicide bombers with explosive belts. According to Mada Masr, during the attack on June 26 an artillery shell **fell** on a residential home killing nine civilians. The responsible party is unknown, through similar reports have **attributed** shelling to the military.

In Rafah, Wilayat Sinai claimed an attack on June 26 against a military minesweeping vehicle using an improvised explosive device (IED), reportedly disabling it and injuring an unspecified number of personnel. On June 27 Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for an IED attack disabling an Egyptian Army bulldozer near the Arish airport.

The attacks bring the total number of attacks reported in the month of June to 20 to date, and the total for 2019 to 97 to date. This compares to 131 attacks reported in the last six months of 2018, 90 in the first six months of 2018, and 254 in the last six months of 2017.

The attacks bring the total number of security casualties reported in June to 28 killed and 43 injured, with a total of 81 killed security forces killed and 56 injured in the year to date. This compares to 57 reported killed in the prior six-month period, 60 in the corresponding period last year, and 179 in the last six months of 2017.

Eight People Arrested by the Ministry of Interior on Charges of Financial Cooperation

On June 25, Egyptian Homeland Security arrested at least eight individuals and raided 19 companies, describing the arrests as part of an anti-terrorist operation in a Ministry of Interior statement. The eight arrested individuals include Ziad Al-Eleaimy, a lawyer and member of the first Egyptian Parliament after the 2011 revolution with the Social Democratic Party; Hesham Fouad, a journalist who has written for *Yum7*, Mada Masr, and *al-Bayan*; Omar Shinti, a businessman; Hossam Mounes, a journalist and former campaign manager for Hamdeen Sabahi; Mustafa Abdel Muaz AbdelSattar, a businessman; Usama Abdel 'Al Muhammad al-Aqbawi, a leader of Egypt's Independence Party; Ahmed Abdel Galil Hussein Ghoneim; and Hassan Muhammad Hassan Barbary, who was **described** as a labor rights activist. The case is likely to have numerous other defendants.

The raids have been condemned by international and domestic civil society, who have characterized the arrests as arbitrary and raised concerns about political motivation. The prosecution is interrogating at least some of the individuals under a new case, Case 930 of 2019, and has suggested it will be exploring potential charges of joining a terrorist organization, helping a terrorist organization achieve its goals, financing a terrorist organization, and publishing false news. These accusations are called into question by the state's failure to present related evidence during interrogation, as well as Egyptian authorities' trend of levying terrorism accusations against individuals for peacefully exercising their constitutionally protected rights. In particular, interrogations in **Case 173** and **Cases 441** and **621** of 2018 have involved the bringing of similar accusations against numerous civil society workers, journalists, and political activists.

Egypt's Ministry of Interior has reported the arrest of over 10,000 individuals in counter-terror raids since 2013. Nearly 85 percent of these were arrested for suspicion of affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Nicaragua Arrests Two Egyptians, Two Iraqis for Suspected Islamic State Ties

Nicaraguan officials arrested four individuals on suspicion that they were affiliated with the Islamic State, including two Egyptians and two Iraqis. All four have reportedly been deported to Costa Rica.

Some news outlets, including the conservative Breitbart News, characterized the arrests as based on an alert from the United States Department of Homeland Security that “warned Mexico about three ISIS terror suspects.” But the alert in fact referenced a biometric database that includes any migrant from a “country of interest”—generally speaking, a Muslim-majority country—raising some skepticism about their actual ties to the Islamic State.

It is unclear what further investigation or legal proceedings the four men will undergo.

Egyptian Cabinet Officials Meet With Russian, Chinese Counterparts

Interior Minister Mahmoud Tawfiq met with Deputy Minister of China’s Public Security Ministry Zao Ganlo to discuss each country’s respective police institutions, Egypt’s security situation, and illegal migration.

Foreign Minister Shoukry and Minister of Defense Mohamad Zaki met with their counterparts with Moscow for planned 2+2 meetings. The ministers discussed increasing defense and security ties between the two countries.

Hisham Ashmawy Tried by Egyptian Military Court

On June 25, the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* reported that a military court is retrying Hisham Ashmawy, former special forces officer-turned-jihadist leader, for five cases, including one in which he was sentenced to death in absentia on charges relating to the killing of border guards in Egypt’s New Valley governorate province. Egyptian authorities also suspect Ashmawy to have been involved in the 2013 assassination attempt of then-interior minister Mohamed Ibrahim, a January 2015 attack on the headquarters of the Army Battalion 101 Headquarters in Arish, a June 2015 attack on the Karnak Temple in Luxor, and the July 2015 assassination of Prosecutor-General Hisham Barakat.

Ashmawy gained notoriety for leading multiple jihadist groups throughout North Africa. Initially an officer in the Egyptian army, Ashmawy eventually radicalized and was dismissed from the armed forces in 2011. He later emerged as a key figure in *Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis*, Wilayat Sinai’s forerunner. Ashmawy broke with the group in 2014, after it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. He reemerged the following year, forming a new terror group, the Libya-based *al-Morabitoon*. Though the group claimed no attacks, Ashmawy was thought to have trained fighters in Derna, Libya.

Ashmawy was captured in Derna by the Libyan National Army in October 2018. He was transferred to Egyptian military officials on May 28, following a meeting between Major General Abbas Kamal, director of the General Intelligence Directorate, and LNA Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar.



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