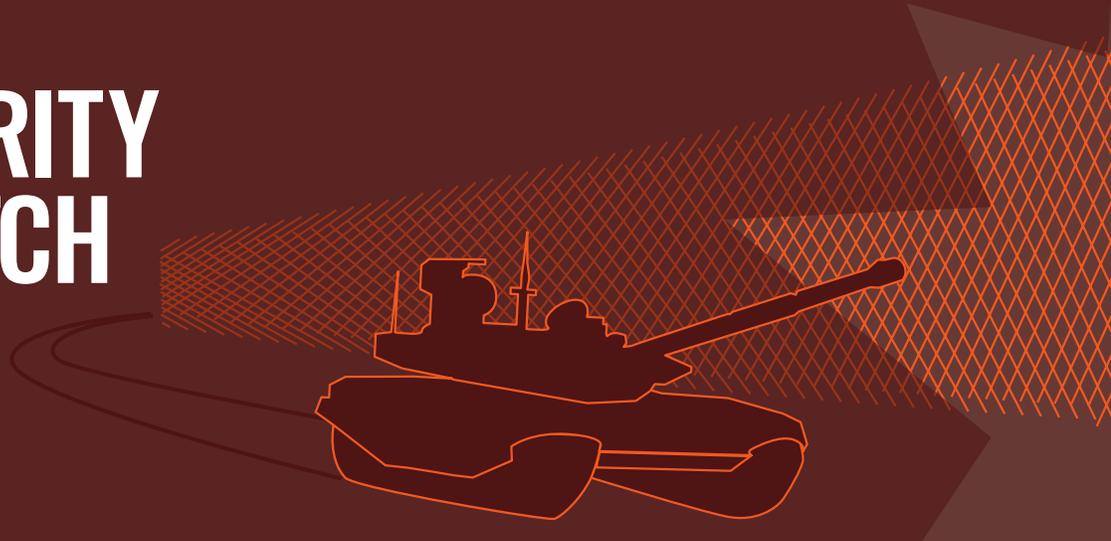




# EGYPT SECURITY WATCH



## WEEK IN BRIEF AUGUST 31–SEPTEMBER 6, 2019

### Summary

- A 27-year-old woman was killed in Sheikh Zuweid in a continuing trend of fatalities and injuries due to stray bullets in North Sinai. No individual has claimed responsibility or been held accountable.
- Wilayat Sinai continued its insurgency efforts, attacking Egypt's Saeqa special forces and an M60 tank and engaging in clashes near Sheikh Zuweid.
- Local media reported that 10 men were kidnapped by militants near Bir al-Abd in North Sinai. The men were all members of the Dawaghra tribe.
- Egypt's Ministry of Interior conducted a counter-terrorism operation on a militant hideout at the Bahariya Oasis in the Western Desert, killing six.
- Egypt's Minister of Interior met with EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove.

## Civilian Deaths Continue in North Sinai

Reports on social media emerged of the death of another civilian in North Sinai, 27-year-old Asma Ahmed Ghalam, who was shot in the head and killed on September 1 while collecting figs at home in Sheikh Zuweid. The killing marks the latest in a month in which multiple deaths due to “stray bullets” have been reported; while the provenance of the bullets is rarely acknowledged, the killings have been widely attributed to security forces who are poorly trained to man checkpoints or conduct effective threat identification during ground operations. While previous reports indicated that two officers and four soldiers had been called to the Military Judicial Department for investigation, the progress or outcome of these investigations has not been made public, despite increasing frustrations expressed by local residents.

## Wilayat Sinai Claims Continued Attacks and Clashes

Wilayat Sinai claimed three incidents this week: on September 5, the group claimed to have engaged in clashes with the Egyptian military near Sheikh Zuweid, using machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. No deaths were reported. Earlier in the week, on September 1, the group claimed two attacks near Arish: an attack on Egyptian Saeqa (Thunderbolt) special forces in which they claimed to have killed and injured “several” men and an improvised explosive device attack on an M60 tank.

## Social Media Reports of Kidnappings near Bir al-Abd

A social media account, the Facebook page “Shahid Sinai” (Witness of Sinai), reported that ten civilians had been kidnapped by militants near the town of Bir al-Abd in North Sinai. The militants were reportedly targeting men from the Dawaghra tribe, one of the tribes known to have worked with Egyptian security forces in the past. While the news was not widely reported by Egyptian or international media, some outlets reported the story as confirmed by an unnamed security source.

The targeting of tribesmen (individually or on a sectarian basis) for their support of the military is common in North Sinai. Wilayat Sinai has regularly reported on its efforts to punish tribesmen for collaborating with the military, and some of its most brutal and violent activity has been carried out to this end. The targeting of the Rawda Mosque in late 2017, for instance, occurred in a nearby area that is home to many members of the Sawarka tribe, one of the most vocal tribes expressing support for the military’s efforts in North Sinai; other kidnappings earlier this year also targeted Sawarka tribesmen. For more on the role of the tribes in counter-terror efforts, see TIMEP’s Brief: Sinai Tribes in Egypt’s War on Terror.

## Egyptian Ministry of Interior Conducts Raids in Bahariya Oasis

On September 5, Egypt’s Ministry of Interior reported that it had killed six in a raid near the Bahariya Oasis, which was the site of a deadly terrorist attack in 2017 that killed servicemen who were attempting to conduct a counter-terrorism operation. Egypt’s Western Desert region has been the site of several large-scale deadly attacks in the past years and has been pinpointed as a site of jihadist movement across the border with Libya; in particular, Hisham Ashmawy, an al-Qaeda affiliated militant and former officer in Egypt’s Saeqa special forces unit was implicated in previous attacks and was recently captured in Libya. Ashmawy was extradited to Egypt and currently faces trial in five terrorism-related cases.

While the raid takes place in an area that has been the site of recent terrorist activity, the failure to apprehend any suspects and the language used in the ministry's statement is similar to that of similar raids. The practice of carrying out such deadly raids has garnered increased scrutiny, as some of those killed were found to have been previously held in police custody, and in other cases photographs of the scenes of the raids were found to have been doctored.

## Egypt's Foreign Minister Meets with EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove

Interior Minister Mahmoud Tawfiq hosted EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove to discuss Egypt's counter-terrorism strategies and joint cooperation between Egypt and the EU for security matters. De Kerchove had previously identified border security, prosecutions, returning children, incarceration, rehabilitation, and countering narratives as critical to mitigating terrorist threats, stating that "a repressive approach alone is not enough." It is unclear to what extent these issues were discussed, though Egyptian media highlighted his praise for Al-Azhar's efforts in combating narratives.



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