

Title: Jihad in the *Jazeera*: Explaining The Islamic State's Growing Insurgent Threat in Egypt

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Research Question:

Why did Wilayat Sinai – The Islamic State's affiliate in the Sinai Peninsula – evolve to become an unprecedented challenge to the Egyptian state?

Importance:

From 2012 to 2015, militant attacks in the Sinai have increased tenfold, to over 100 attacks per month on average in 2015. Egyptian military casualties are estimated to be over 700 deaths and counting – far higher than the 400 killed during the five-year Islamist insurgency in the 1990s. Egypt's continuing struggle and inability to defeat the Wilayat Sinai-led insurgency is puzzling considering its numerical superiority, better military equipment, and extensive support from powerful countries. Growing instability in Egypt poses important implications for international security, especially since the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty remains a major cornerstone for regional stability. This paper is novel by applying insights from the literature to the insurgency in Sinai.

Research Findings:

This paper evaluates the literature on civil wars and insurgencies and finds the following variables to be most compelling in explaining the onset of the 2011 Sinai insurgency: permissive conditions of weak governance and persistent grievances and proximate factors of Salafi-jihadist ideology and sudden regime change. Furthermore, the emergence of Wilayat Sinai as the most effective insurgent organization capable of inflicting mounting casualties among Egyptian security forces is best explained by three factors: militants' ability to consolidate a safe haven in northeastern Sinai, ineffective Egyptian counterinsurgency tactics, and securing vital external support – primarily from Hamas' military wing and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Implications:

The Egyptian regime must acknowledge that its military focused counterinsurgency strategy is failing and begin refocusing its efforts on political solutions, particularly improving Sinai Bedouin's socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, emerging rifts between Wilayat Sinai and its main external patrons should be exploited in order to weaken outside support networks and undermine recruitment efforts from within. Western governments, including Canada, should pressure the Egyptian regime to adopt new counterinsurgency practices in return for ongoing military and economic assistance.