



# Sinai: The Buffer Erodes

Nicolas Pelham

September 2012



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## About the Author

**Nicolas Pelham** is *The Economist's* correspondent in Jerusalem, a writer on Arab affairs for the *New York Review of Books*, and research director for TIDA, a centre of studies in Gaza founded by Dr Eyad Serraj. From 2005 to 2010 he was the Israel/Palestine senior analyst for International Crisis Group, and covered extensively the rise of the region's national-religious movements. He began work as a journalist in Egypt in 1992, and later joined the BBC Arabic Service. Since 1998 he has travelled the Arab world for *The Economist*, serving as the paper's correspondent in Morocco, Jordan and Iraq. He has worked as a consultant for the UN on Gaza's political economy, and is the author of *A New Muslim Order* (2008), which traces Shia resurgence in the Arab world, and co-author of *A History of the Middle East* (2010).

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# Executive Summary

For over 30 years, the Sinai peninsula has served as a near-empty territory cushioning the geopolitical aspirations of Egypt, Israel and the Palestinians. With the changes brought about in Egypt by President Hosni Mubarak's fall from power in 2011, that buffer is in doubt. The state security apparatus that underpinned the Egyptian regime collapsed, creating a vacuum that the territory's sparse Bedouin population quickly filled with coping mechanisms of its own. Captivated by the prospect of acquiring power, local irregulars reacted fiercely to the regime's efforts to regain control over its periphery, culminating in the August 2012 operation that targeted an Egyptian base, killing 16 soldiers, and perforated Israel's border defences at the intersection of its border with Egypt and Gaza. Security officials, police stations, government buildings and Cairo-based institutions have all come under attack. In the eyes of its neighbours, Egypt is losing its grip over Sinai, transforming the peninsula into a theatre for the region's competing new forces.

As Sinai's internal stability erodes, other givens of regional security seem increasingly fragile. Groups antithetical to the old order have found a haven not only in the isolation of Sinai's mountains, but in the thoroughfares of its largest city, El Arish. Cross-border assaults by non-state actors have exacerbated tensions between Egypt and Israel, calling into question the durability of their peace treaty signed in 1979. Having consolidated its grip on Gaza, the Islamist movement Hamas is expanding its reach beyond the confines of the narrow enclave into its Sinai backyard. Israel's closure of Gaza's northern and eastern borders has quickened the process, turning Sinai into Gaza's primary trade and access route. Sinai's indigenous population struggles to maintain its share of scarce resources and of the supply chain, in part by playing the various regional rivals off against one another.

Egypt's efforts to claw back a semblance of the authority it enjoyed under the old order have met with mixed results. The central government's relations with some tribal elders have improved, and the repeated attacks on state assets in Sinai have ebbed. But promises of a new dawn for Bedouin–Nile Valley relations have yet to materialize, and the police have yet to re-establish control. Future cross-border attacks or sabotage of shipping lines in the Straits of Tiran or through the Suez Canal could yet trigger regional escalation. Few can predict with confidence Sinai's long-term stability. Without a new political contract balancing the new power and trade relationships in the peninsula, Sinai's continued fragility could render it a proxy battlefield for surrounding powers.

The old accords underpinning regional security relations have failed to keep pace with the changing times. Devised when Egyptian and Israeli state forces reigned supreme, they are ill-suited to an era when a new quasi-state actor has emerged on Sinai's borders in the shape of the Hamas government of Gaza, and when transnational actors from Islamist movements to cross-border Bedouin clans challenge the central authorities in and around Sinai. The separation of state forces that enhanced regional security following Israel's 1980 Sinai withdrawal has now created a security vacuum that endangers it.

To guard against further erosion of regional security, the Egyptian government, Sinai's population and neighbouring governments should urgently consider the following steps:

- The integration of the Bedouin into the formal structures of Egyptian rule in Sinai, particularly the security forces.
- The formalization of access and movement as well as trade relationships across Sinai's borders with Gaza and Israel.
- Enhanced security coordination between the governments of Egypt, Israel and the Gaza Strip.

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# 1 Sinai's Indigenous People

Historically the nexus between two continents, the Sinai peninsula has long marked the strategic pivot over which competing regional players have vied for influence. From the jostle for power between ancient Egypt and the Assyrians to that between the Ottoman and British Empires and more recently to the ongoing rivalry between Israel and Egypt, the peninsula has served as the touchstone of the regional balance of forces.

This report examines the attempts by the governments of Egypt, Israel and Gaza to protect what they view as their vital security and commercial interests, alternately perceiving Sinai as both a buffer against external predators and a weak unstable territory ripe for expanding their respective spheres of influence. In addition to the triangular relationship, it analyses their policies towards the transnational movements and the indigenous population, viewing them variously as tools of leverage and potential threats. The report concludes with an assessment of the potential scenarios if deep-seated tensions remain unaddressed. It offers a series of recommendations designed to forestall spiralling instability, not least by upholding the rights and aspirations of Sinai's indigenous people.

Extending over 61,000 square kilometres, Sinai is almost twice the size of Egypt's Nile Valley and Delta, three times the size of Israel and 200 times the size of Gaza, but is only sparsely populated. Most of the population inhabits the coastal rim and the northern plains. Almost 400,000 people, most of whom are sedentary, live in the coastal plain of North Sinai province, including 145,000 in or around the provincial capital, El Arish.<sup>1</sup> A further 165,000 maintain a largely nomadic lifestyle in mountainous South Sinai.<sup>2</sup> Divided among some 20 tribes with between 500 and 25,000 men each, the 300,000 Bedouin in the two provinces comprise 70 per cent of the population. However, their majority has been reduced by rapid labour migration from the Nile Valley.

The peninsula has very high population growth: South Sinai's annual increase is over four times the national average, making it the fastest-growing province in Egypt. Though Sinai lies on Egypt's periphery, unemployment there is low and per capita income and literacy are above the national average, particularly in the south, which has the second highest income level of Egypt's 26 provinces owing to its tourism and oil production around Abu Rudeis.<sup>3</sup> Disparities in the distribution of wealth are pronounced, however, particularly between Bedouin and people from the Nile Valley.

Ethnically, historically and linguistically, the indigenous Bedouin population has closer ties to the lands to its east than to its west. 'Our language and our traditions are the same as Gaza's. We're 40 kilometres from Rafah, and 200 kilometres from Cairo,' said a Bedouin tribal leader.<sup>4</sup> Bedouin tribal domains straddle Israeli and Gazan borders.<sup>5</sup> The traditional lands of the Tarabeen, for instance, extend from the Egyptian–Gazan border as far east as Beersheva and as far west as Sinai's west coast.<sup>6</sup> A large

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1 El Arish is mostly divided between urbanized Bedouin (about 33%), Egyptians from the Nile Valley (25%), Palestinian refugees (25%) and descendants of the Bosnian and Turkish battalions posted during the Ottoman Empire (15%). Figures supplied by an El Arish NGO, July 2011.

2 According to Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 398,026 live in North Sinai province, and 159,504 in South Sinai, <http://www.capmas.gov.eg>. By contrast, 75 million people inhabit Egypt's Nile Valley.

3 In 2007 per capita income was LE 12,455 (\$2,250) in South Sinai against a national average of LE 10246 (\$1,851). The rate of annual population growth is 8.5% in South Sinai and 2.9% in North Sinai, against a national average of 2.0%. Unemployment is 3.8% in North Sinai and 7.8% in South Sinai, against a national average of 8.9%. The rate of adult literacy is 88.4% in South Sinai and 75.8% in North Sinai, against a national average of 70.4%. UNDP, *Egypt Human Development Report*, 2010, pp. 254–73.

4 Interview, tribal leader, El Arish, July 2011.

5 'From the point of view of the Bedouin tribes, there's no border here. It's not part of his tradition or his way of thinking!' Interview, Israeli commander, Eilat, February 2012.

6 For a map of tribal domains see Appendix B. A more detailed map can be found in Clinton Bailey, *Bedouin Poetry: From Sinai and the Negev*, Saqi Books, 1992.



Palestinian presence, about 40,000 strong, in three northern towns near the Gaza border – Rafah, Sheikh Zuwayed and El Arish – reinforces links to the northeast. However, high internal migration from the Nile Valley, driven by job opportunities in tourism and state bureaucracy, has strengthened Sinai's links to Egypt's centre.<sup>7</sup> As a result of internal labour migration, men in South Sinai outnumber women by two to one.

### Relations between Sinai and the centre before Mubarak's fall

Over the years, Egyptian government policies coupled with rapid socio-economic change exacerbated Sinai's demographic divide. Though falling far short of official targets, Egypt's policy of mass settlement from the Nile Valley stimulated by state subsidies and privileges threatens the status of the indigenous population. Most Bedouin tribes received Egyptian citizenship following the demarcation of the border between the Ottoman Porte and the British Protectorate of Egypt in 1906, resulting in the transfer of Sinai to the Egyptian government. But the indigenous population says that the government continues to treat it as susceptible to foreign influence across the border and a potential fifth column.<sup>8</sup> Bedouin leaders complain of systematic discrimination, including dispossession of land and the denial of ownership rights.<sup>9</sup> They also complain of exclusion from government positions,<sup>10</sup> and participation and consultation in government-backed development projects. There is pronounced resentment over the development of the 'Red Sea Riviera' during the 1990s and 2000s. The rampant construction has been protected by a military cordon, and pushed Bedouin tribes from the southern coast into the hinterland. President Mubarak's conversion of Sharm al-Sheikh into his summer capital, turning a small Bedouin fishing village into an Egyptian city within a decade, typified the state's prioritization of Nile Valley needs over those of the local population. Development projects in the north, including the construction of an industrial zone, the opening of agro-businesses and the laying of the gas pipeline to Israel and Jordan, similarly continue to be perceived as a means to sequester Bedouin land while sharing few, if any, of the benefits.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Bedouin activists complain that although the north Sinai base of the Multi-National Force and Observers (MFO), which has supervised implementation of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty since its outset, is one of the province's largest employers, recruitment has been in the hands of Care Services Company, which enjoys close ties with Egypt's security forces and which activists say shuns the hire of Bedouin for managerial positions.<sup>12</sup> By diverting resources and land away from the Bedouin, state planning not only favoured Egyptians relocating from the Nile Valley, it also weakened traditional tribal economic coping mechanisms, such as subsistence agriculture.

Government neglect and disdain compounded the discontent. Plans to channel Nile waters to the Gazan border to support agriculture stopped in their tracks as mega-projects elsewhere in Egypt took

7 In 2007, the net lifetime internal migration was 27.4 % into South Sinai and 14.1% into North Sinai, against a national average of 6.6%. UNDP, *Egypt Human Development Report*, p. 271.

8 'The state treats us as Mossad agents. Our fathers were Egypt's eyes and ears on the ground during the occupation and helped Egypt's forces cross the Suez Canal in the 1973 war, but they say we are not nationalists. I am not a traitor, but I am treated as a third class citizen. If I am not given equal rights, I will explode.' Interview, Maysa Ayad Al-Atrash, Bedouin teacher, Sheikh Zuwayed, August 2012. The suspicion was compounded by the view expressed by some Bedouin that Israel had made some effort to develop North Sinai 'in the hope that it would foster a separatist movement against Egypt'. Interview, Bedouin activist, Sheikh Zuwayed, August 2012. Some Egyptians dubbed the Bedouin 'Yahud Sina', Sinai's Jews.

9 'The state considers tribal lands state land.' Interview, NGO worker, El Arish, July 2011. State officials frequently cited concerns that Israelis and Palestinians would use their greater purchasing power to secure control of land in Egypt's strategic land-bridge to Asia. 'They tell us that if we own our own land we'll sell it to Jews and Palestinians.' Interview, Amar Salah Joda, Bedouin academic, El Arish, August 2011. According to a former long-time North Sinai governor, Munir Shash, the state overturned his order recognizing Bedouin ownership (though Bedouin leaders dispute he ever did so). 'When I went to Sinai, the land was owned by the state. I said to the Bedouin, "Whoever cultivates the land, owns it." They got contracts to farm their land, and the area of cultivated land rose from 82,000 to 307,000 feddans. Unfortunately, after I left, the lands were repossessed by the state.' Interview by *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 25 July 2010. A *feddan* is approximately one acre.

10 Members from major tribes such as the Swarka, Tayaha and Tarabeen complain that they were never appointed to positions on local or regional councils, or the ranks of the then-ruling National Democratic Party. Interviews, El Arish, June 2011.

11 Bedouin activists cited the much greater investment in southern Sinai, with its small indigenous population, as an example of the government's marginalization of the north. 'We have huge tourism potential on the beaches around El Arish, but the government is only interested in the south.' Interview, Maysa Ayad Al-Atrash, Bedouin teacher, Sheikh Zuwayed, August 2012.

12 Phone interview, Bedouin observer, El Arish, April 2012. See company website, <http://174.121.128.4/~careserv/cms.php?id=378>.

precedence.<sup>13</sup> Bedouin were also barred from the military and most security services: while they were spared Egypt's military draft, they lost access to the state benefits and job opportunities that accrued from military service. Sinai's prime formal money-spinner, tourism, was also largely a Nile Valley affair; many hotel resorts operated as gated communities, off limits to locals.<sup>14</sup> The state bureaucracy and the education system offered sinecures to internal migrants. Heightening the sense of the centre's estrangement from Sinai, many government employees left their families in the Nile Valley, commuting every fortnight.

Such policies have attenuated centralizing forces and intensified identity politics. Far from identifying with Egypt, many Bedouin regard it as an alien entity, referring to the Nile Valley newcomers as 'Egyptians', as if they are settlers threatening local survival. The animosity is tangible. 'The government treats you as if you're from another country,' said an unemployed Bedouin labourer in El Arish.<sup>15</sup> 'Egypt wanted a land without a people,' said a tribal leader. 'But they are the guests, not us. They have no roots.'

With locals alienated from the formal economy and with Egypt's sovereign powers in the border zone limited by the military constraints imposed by the Camp David accords, the state has relied on a harsh and widely loathed security regime – staffed almost entirely by personnel from the Nile Valley – to keep the population in check. A surprisingly high proportion of residents interviewed in North Sinai claimed they had been detained or beaten by agents of the feared State Security. The interior ministry ran 13 police stations in North Sinai alone, required residents of the Egyptian part of Rafah to obtain exit permits in order to leave the city, and erected a series of checkpoints on highways obstructing movement towards the oil-and-tourism-rich south. 'The police would spot the Sinai licence plates on your car and suspect you're a car bomber. It would take a whole day to cross the Suez Canal,' said a taxi driver.<sup>16</sup> Bedouin seeking a sliver of the tourism profits through sales of trinkets or camel-rides in such cities as Sharm al-Sheikh reported being chased away or detained for violations such as unauthorized trading. A North Sinai resident caught by police at a checkpoint outside Sharm al-Sheikh said he was incarcerated for two days in a windowless solitary cage too small to move in.<sup>17</sup> Reports of extortion were widespread. Many sentenced to lengthy terms alleged that police took bribes for not implementing judgments. 'If you don't pay, they imprison you,' said one tunnel operator, who claimed he was strung from his arms during ten days of detention and made to pay a LE 250,000 (\$45,000) bribe to escape a five-year prison sentence.<sup>18</sup> A security dragnet and intensified crackdown, beginning in 2004 following a series of bombings targeting Egypt's tourist resorts, compounded local resentment.

Egypt's authorities further perceived tribal loyalties as a threat to national ones. Attempting to subvert these, governors prevented Sinai's tribes from electing their own *mukhtars*, or chiefs, and appointed them instead. They further sought to fracture large tribal structures into small social units by appointing tribal chiefs in hundreds of Bedouin villages.<sup>19</sup> Urban development compounded the fragmentation.

The growth of the informal economy, however, has militated against the pace of the decline of tribal networks. Excluded from key formal economic sectors, such as tourism or authorized land-cultivation, the indigenous population gravitated towards unlicensed tourism services, cannabis and opium cultivation, arms-running and smuggling, both into Israel and to Gaza. Each tribe vigilantly defended its own territory's assets and guarded against poaching by other tribes or the state, enhancing non-state loyalties and patronage networks.<sup>20</sup> The three main tribes straddling the Egyptian–Gazan border – the Sawarka, Rumaylat and Tarabeen – dominated the tunnel trade. The Tarabeen also managed much of the

13 In 1997, the Mubarak regime adopted the Toshka Project, switching its focus to the creation of a second Nile Valley in Upper Egypt, which despite the investment failed to materialize.

14 'The Egyptians kept the oil, the pipelines, the tourism, and the land for themselves.' Interview, Bedouin tribal leader, El Arish, July 2011.

15 Interview, El Arish, July 2011.

16 Interview, El Arish, July 2011.

17 Interview, former detainee, El Arish, July 2011.

18 Interview, tunnel operator, Rafah (Egyptian side), July 2011.

19 'Every tribe had its own sheikh, elected in a specific way. But now, authorities choose sheikhs based on their relationship with the police.' Interview with Munir Shash, former North Sinai governor, *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 25 July 2010. The authorities appointed some 200 *mukhtars* in North Sinai alone. Interview, tribal leader, El Arish, July 2011. 'After 1979, Egypt turned the tribes upside down. Today the *mukhtar* is just a salaried employee of the government. No one respects them like they do in Jordan or the Gulf.' Interview, Bedouin leader, El Arish, July 2011.

20 For instance, the Muzayna and Tarabeen exclude other tribes from tourism markets along the southeast Sinai coast. The Garasha guard their opium cultivation in the centre.

smuggling into Israel, including the traffic of marijuana. Further south, around the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat, the Azazmeh and Ahaiwat traded in smuggled cigarettes, drugs and migrants.<sup>21</sup> Thus indigenous and extraneous populations largely cultivated separate economic systems.

Intermittently, friction between the two sides triggered bouts of violence. A total of 130 people were killed in car bombings between 2004 and 2006 on Sinai's Red Sea resorts of Taba, Ras al-Shaitan and Nuweiba, near Egypt's border with Eilat (October 2004), Sharm al-Sheikh (July 2005) and Dahab (April 2006). This threatened tourism, one of Egypt's top revenue earners. In 2005 and 2006, militants also carried out two attacks (without casualties) on MFO operations just south of the Gaza border, possibly targeting it as a symbol of the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty. Most of the perpetrators came from tribes in northern Sinai, where the population was less invested in the spin-offs of tourism than in the south and had closer ties to jihadi currents both in the Nile Valley<sup>22</sup> and in Gaza. Egypt blamed the attacks on Islamist groups comprised of Palestinians and Bedouin primarily originating from three northern tribes, Sawarka, Masa'id and Tarabeen.<sup>23</sup> Within days of the first car-bomb attacks, the authorities arrested 3,000 suspects in dragnet operations, which left North Sinai's three main Palestinian towns under quasi-siege.<sup>24</sup> By subjecting jihadi activists and the North Sinai Bedouin to the same forms of repression and collective punishment, state security forces played a significant role in fusing tribal and jihadi identities and merging Bedouin resistance and Islamist militancy.

Had Egypt's government delivered on promises to develop Sinai in 2006, it is possible that the subsequent years might have considerably advanced the integration of the Bedouin population into Egypt's social fabric. As it was, the prime economic opportunities surfaced elsewhere, adding a further centrifugal pull. The blockade Israel and Egypt imposed on Gaza in 2007 led to the growth of supply routes via tunnels between Gaza and Sinai, fostering common interests between Bedouin traders, transporters and tunnel owners and Gaza's consumers, and pitting Egypt's official policy against Bedouin livelihoods.<sup>25</sup> Israel's three-mile exclusion zone off the coast of Gaza decimated the latter's fishing industry but bolstered North Sinai's, which readily filled the shortfall through the tunnels. By 2009 smuggling to Gaza had become Sinai's economic staple, connecting the peninsula to overland contraband routes as far afield as Sudan and Libya. On the Egyptian side of the border, Rafah was dotted with elegant new mansions Palestinian and Bedouin traders built from the proceeds. 'A decade ago, my whole clan had three cars. Nowadays each household does,' said a Bedouin trader in Rafah.<sup>26</sup> In recognition of Gaza's economic clout, an 18-man delegation from North Sinai's Chamber of Commerce visited Gaza in February 2012 – the first official Egyptian trade delegation in five years of siege.<sup>27</sup>

Informal trading with Israel was another external factor. Tapping into clan networks straddling the Egyptian–Israeli border, Bedouin traders supplied Israel with drugs cultivated in Sinai and migrant workers, first from Eastern Europe and more recently from the Horn of Africa.<sup>28</sup> Reinforcing their local ties with a territory they had occupied from 1967 to 1981, Israelis continued to visit the south Sinai coast, frequenting cheap, unlicensed Bedouin-run camps rather than the large Nile Valley-owned hotels. Bedouin staff continued to hone their Hebrew language skills to service visiting Israelis. Sporadic instances of intermarriage were also reported.

21 See SBS, 'Dateline, Australia', 6 March 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACQQnTohiCw>.

22 Nile Valley jihadi groups repeatedly targeted tourists, for instance perpetrating the 1997 Luxor attack, killing 67 tourists, and the 2009 bombing of Cairo's Khan al-Khalili market.

23 The founders of Tawhid wal-Jihad, the group that claimed responsibility for the bombing, were Khalid al-Masad, a dentist from the Sawarka tribe, and Nasser Mallahi, a North Sinai Palestinian.

24 'Egypt: Mass Arrests and Torture in Sinai', Human Rights Watch, February 2005. The bombings displayed extensive use of local knowledge. The bombs that exploded in Dahab were delivered by a farmer's truck carrying fruit and vegetables to market, and routinely waved through the checkpoint at the entrance to the city. Interview, foreign observer, September 2011.

25 For further background on the Gaza–Sinai tunnel economy, see Nicolas Pelham, 'Gaza's Tunnel Phenomenon: The Unintended Dynamics of Israel's Siege', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Summer 2012), pp. 6–31.

26 Interview, Rafah (Egyptian side), July 2011.

27 Interview, Gaza Chamber of Commerce delegate Maher al-Tabbaa, Gaza, February 2012.

28 The number of migrants increased from a few hundred per month in 2006 to 3,000 per month by end 2011, 75% of them from Eritrea. Interview, Israeli army officer, Eilat, February 2012. Israeli official data put the number at 16,000 Africans in 2011 – up from around 12,000 in 2010. Interview, Israeli army commander, Eilat, February 2011; 'IDF chief: Southern border fence won't end illegal immigration', *Haaretz*, 22 December 2010; the Research and Information Center of the Israeli Parliament put the 2010 figure at 11,763. Knesset report, 16 January 2011, p. 3.

Accompanying the growth of the organized informal economy was the rise of informal armed groups. To protect their sources of income from rivals and Egyptian patrols, tunnel operators tapped into Bedouin clan defence committees versed in Sinai's topography through centuries of roaming the terrain. Many were well armed thanks to the clandestine arms they trafficked through the tunnels. On occasion, Bedouin irregulars clashed directly with Egyptian security forces operating against the tunnel trade.<sup>29</sup>

### The fall of Mubarak and Sinai's uprising

With multiple internal and external factors eroding its ties to the centre, Sinai's indigenous population greeted President Mubarak's February 2011 resignation as an opportunity to shrug off Egypt's internal security yoke and push for communal empowerment. Unlike the predominantly peaceful demonstrators who filled the streets of Cairo and Alexandria, many of Sinai's Bedouin protestors were armed. Even before Mubarak's downfall, police abandoned their stations in North Sinai's main border towns of Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed. Militants fired rocket-propelled grenades at the Rafah police station in February 2011. After storming it, protestors ransacked the building and incinerated its files. Further attacks on police stations and prisons ensued in which at least 10 were killed and 50 wounded.<sup>30</sup> In Nuweiba, Bedouin protestors drove the security chief, who had acquired a reputation for torture, out of the town, warning him never to return.<sup>31</sup> In Northern Sinai, Bedouin killed three Egyptian soldiers when they drove through a checkpoint. Under armed assault elsewhere, police and state security personnel took flight.<sup>32</sup> There were a number of prison breakouts by Bedouin who had been held since the 2004–06 dragnet, compounding the spirit of revanchism.

Where previously loss of government control was contained within the Jabal Halal, the mountainous outcrop 60 kilometres south of El Arish,<sup>33</sup> the resulting security vacuum spread to Sinai's populous north. Looting of central government institutions was widespread. On the Egyptian side of Rafah, residents broke into bank vaults, and across North Sinai most, if not all, of the 13 police stations were plundered and stripped of their weapons and equipment. The absence of licence plates on El Arish's roads testifies to the number of looted government vehicles. 'Anything identified with the government was smashed, including the memorial for the unknown soldier,' said a Rafah graduate.<sup>34</sup> Nile Valley migrants, watching the unfolding chaos with alarm, sent their families to relatives west of the Suez Canal. According to an Egyptian lawyer, 'the Bedouin have grown so strong, and want no one to rule over them.'<sup>35</sup> Observers in El Arish said some central Sinai Bedouin were demanding protection money to safeguard Egyptian businesses. Vehicles with Nile Valley licence plates were reportedly carjacked. Following threats, the head of a women's association fled west after 30 years in Nakhil, an isolated Sinai town.<sup>36</sup>

As Egypt's police state dissolved, Sinai's residents enjoyed freedom of movement, unencumbered by security checks and checkpoints, for the first time in decades. Bedouin families revived age-old coping mechanisms from clan solidarity – tribal security and arbitration according to customary law (*urf*) administered by reconciliation committees (*lijan al-islah*) and tribal militias.<sup>37</sup> The collapse of the formal economy precipitated by a rapid decline in tourism revenues and a loss of state control enhanced Bedouin development of informal activity. State destruction of cannabis and opium plantations fell by over 90 per cent.<sup>38</sup> As noted, the traffic

29 'Egypt police raid Gaza car smuggling tunnel', BBC Online, 7 July 2010.

30 'Reporter: Egypt police kill 10 in Sinai jailbreak', Maan News Agency, 11 February 2011, <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=359111>.

31 Interview, foreign observer, September 2011.

32 'Egypt losing control of Sinai to Bedouin', *Jerusalem Post*, 13 February 2011.

33 Jabal Halal's reputation for rebellion stretches back generations. It was the launchpad for repeated operations against Israel's 1967–82 occupation.

34 Interview, Rafah (Egyptian side), July 2011.

35 Interview, Egyptian lawyer, El Arish, July 2011.

36 Interview, NGO head, El Arish, June 2010.

37 For a video of the Barhoum clan militia conducting training exercises with rocket launchers on the Egyptian side of Rafah see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crBp-xApEwo>.

38 The Egyptian government largely suspended anti-drug operations by its Anti-Narcotics General Administration's Eradication Unit in the wake of the uprising. Destruction of crops slumped from 243 *feddan* of cannabis and 514 *feddan* of opium poppies in 2010 to 65 *feddan* of cannabis in 2011. Data derived from US State Department's INCSR reports for 2011 and 2012. See <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2012/vol1/184099.htm> and <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/156575.pdf>.

in Horn of Africa migrants to Israel mushroomed, and even after Israel sought to plug the conduits with the construction of a wall (see below), traffickers resorted with seeming impunity to shocking levels of abuse in an attempt to maintain revenues.<sup>39</sup> Tunnel owners reported that operations by Egypt's security forces had almost ceased, with virtually no impounding of materials, only token destruction of tunnel mouths, and a marked decrease in the demand for bribes. Operators used the calm and increased profits to upgrade tunnels, replacing the *shahata* pulley mechanism with rails, much as in coalmines. Some tunnels offered motorized transport, making the underground crossing not only less bureaucratic but less laborious than that the formal passages above ground.

Efforts to re-establish state authority proved fraught. The evening after a brief but rare visit by Egypt's prime minister in April 2011, Bedouin activists torched the trans-Sinai gas pipeline, cutting supplies for 45 days. A month later Egypt's security forces sought to reopen North Sinai's police stations, only to confront armed tribes determined to block their return. Only in El Arish did the authorities succeed in opening the police station, and despite the accompanying military presence it, too, came under repeated attack. While the peninsula had long served as a conduit for arms smuggling to Gaza, looting of Libyan army and paramilitary depots substantially bolstered the quantity, quality and range of weapons involved.<sup>40</sup> Some clans reportedly smuggled 14.5mm anti-aircraft guns and multi-barrel rocket launchers via Egypt's Salloum crossing and, as in Libya, mounted them on the back of pick-ups. By mid-2011, tribal leaders claimed they had amassed sufficient weaponry – medium-range as well as light arms – to out-gun the army.<sup>41</sup> In a coordinated attack across Israel's border on 18 August 2011, Bedouin reportedly fired anti-aircraft missiles at Israeli helicopters for the first time.

To increase their leverage, armed tribesmen travelling in Toyota Hilux 4x4s – the new camel of the desert – threatened the authorities' key sources of Sinai-based revenue: tourism, traffic to the Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs) in the Nile Valley, and the trans-Sinai gas pipeline. Over the course of 2011 and into 2012, armed groups blocked Cairo's highway to Sharm al-Sheikh,<sup>42</sup> reportedly taking control of Nuweiba port,<sup>43</sup> and disrupted the road plied by trucks hauling goods between the Israeli crossing at Ouja/Nitzana and the QIZs.<sup>44</sup> They also targeted the \$500-million Egyptian National Gas Company (GASCO) pipeline funnelling Nile Delta gas through North Sinai to Israel and Jordan. Armed Bedouin tribesmen in South Sinai kidnapped tourists on several occasions in early 2012, hampering Egypt's ability to reverse the industry's sharp decline after the uprising against Mubarak. Though all were released unharmed, the kidnapping of tourists could indicate possible seepage of North Sinai tactics southwards in the wake of the sharp downturn in tourism revenues.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike the Bedouin bombing campaign against Sinai resorts seven years earlier, in which less than ten per cent of the 130 victims were Israeli, many of the targets were Israeli-related, culminating in the cross-border assault on 18 August 2011, mentioned above. Israel's efforts to reduce its economic ties with Sinai in the face of the rising security threat harmed Bedouin economic interests and may have helped prompt

39 In place of the standard fee of \$3,000 for transfer from Eritrea to Israel, Bedouin traffickers sought to raise upwards of \$30,000 by torturing and raping migrants, filing the abuse and charging their families a ransom for their release. 'They started using electricity on us. They put [a] small cable around our fingers, or legs and later switched it on. During electrocution they cuffed our arms together and lifted us from the ground and they would call our families so they would hear our cries and sufferings.' Testimony from an Eritrean woman held for five months in a Sinai transit camp conducted by an international agency in an Israeli detention camp on 30 May 2012, on file with author. Her sister died from wounds caused by electrocution.

40 'Smuggled Libyan weapons flood into Egypt', *Washington Post*, 13 October 2011. The article quoted a retired Egyptian military intelligence general, Sameh Seif al-Yazal, as saying: 'We believe some Palestinian groups made a deal with Libyans to get special weapons such as shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles.' So prolific were shoulder-fired Stinger-like anti-aircraft missiles that prices were reported to have dropped from \$10,000 to \$4,000 a piece.

41 Interview, tribal leader, El Arish, July 2011. An activist claims that the Camp David accord limitations on the weapons Egypt's army could deploy in the peninsula further favoured Bedouin militias. While Egypt's army was restricted from fielding rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) in eastern Sinai, Bedouin tribes maintained copious supplies. Interview, Mosaad Abu Fajr, Cairo, 30 March 2012.

42 'Armed Bedouin cut off road to Egyptian resort town', Reuters, 28 May 2011.

43 Gilad Stern, Einav Yogeve and Yoram Schweitzer, 'Egypt-Sinai-Gaza', *INSS Insight* No. 271, 28 July 2011, Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University.

44 'Bedouins block passage to Sinai-Israel crossing', Maan News Agency, 11 June 2012. They only permitted shipments of Qatari fuel bound for Gaza to cross.

45 Observers note that unlike the jihadi-infused North, South Sinai Bedouin upheld tribal customs safeguarding the life of hostages and following traditional practices of negotiation, and appear designed more to embarrass the state authorities for short-term gain than to slaughter their common cash-cow.

the shift of focus in the attacks. The ban on Israeli tourists visiting Sinai,<sup>46</sup> and Israel's construction of a wall curtailing cross-border trafficking (see below) severely affected Bedouin livelihoods and enhanced the economic clout of tribes straddling the border with Gaza relative to those straddling the border with Israel, further cementing Palestinian–Bedouin cooperation. While formal traffic with Israel declined, the informal movement of goods through the tunnels to Gaza increased. Egyptian counter-attacks against Bedouin suspects provoked a local backlash,<sup>47</sup> while attempts to woo North Sinai Bedouin tribes, for instance with payments to safeguard the pipeline, enhanced their economic clout, but proved of little avail in stemming the attacks.<sup>48</sup>

Yet the deterioration in security had its drawbacks for the indigenous population as well. Work at the MFO and the military-owned cement factory near El Arish – North Sinai's two largest sources of employment – was disrupted. In January 2012, armed Bedouin briefly held and released unharmed 25 Chinese technicians from the factory, and in March 2012 laid siege to the MFO's el-Gorah base for nine days, cutting access to their airfield.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Sinai's squabbling tribes were too competitive and tribal structures too eroded by Egypt's security apparatus to be capable of restoring order. Clan feuding in the peninsula soared, as Bedouin rushed to arms to pursue disputes over debts, land and access to water wells. El Arish fell victim to an unprecedented spate of tribal vendettas – marked by hostage-taking, carjacking and the establishment of unofficial checkpoints. Bedouin attempts at self-rule coincided with a splurge of notices tied to lampposts recording the names of missing women, presumed to have been abducted. Merchants armed themselves with guns before shipping merchandise. The growing radicalism of Islamist power-brokers further unnerved many among the indigenous population who had initially given their backing.<sup>50</sup> 'We've empowered the population with money and guns, and turned Sinai into a jungle,' said a prominent Bedouin journalist.<sup>51</sup>

Barred by Hamas from pursuing feuds in Gaza, some Bedouin from Gaza crossed via tunnel to seek vengeance in Sinai.<sup>52</sup> In signs of mounting rivalry over the pickings of the informal trade routes to Gaza and Israel, relations between the tribal confederations across the two borders grew increasingly acrimonious. Sheikh Suleiman Siyah, a salafi tribal preacher from the Rumaylat tribe straddling Rafah, allied with local tribesmen and mounted a strident campaign against human-trafficking to Israel. Tribesmen along the Israeli border responded with public protests against fuel-smuggling to Gaza, which they blamed for causing severe shortages within the peninsula (and elsewhere in Egypt). By March 2012, the rivalry had escalated from a war of words into intermittent skirmishes and kidnappings between rival militias.<sup>53</sup> In short, far from reinforcing the Bedouin's collective weight *vis-à-vis* external forces, the increased flow of arms only fuelled their internal power struggles. 'No tribe,' said a Bedouin rights campaigner, 'wants to fight alone.'<sup>54</sup> A local aid worker in El Arish expressed similar sentiments: 'We used to resolve our disputes peacefully, but now everyone has weapons and resorts to violence.'<sup>55</sup> Spiralling levels of violence and general mayhem, noted one of the governor's security advisers, played into government hands, as ordinary Bedouin increasingly pleaded for the restoration of stability.<sup>56</sup>

46 The Taba crossing was closed to Israelis for the first time since its opening in 1982 on security grounds. *Haaretz*, 26 September 2011.

47 For instance, the day after the reported death in custody of an Islamist leader, militants targeted the gas pipeline for a twelfth time. 'New blast hits Sinai gas pipeline: officials', AFP, 5 February 2012.

48 'The Egyptian gas to Israel and its calamities', *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 2 August 2011.

49 Other MFO posts also came under siege. 'They came burning tyres, took the lights out, came under the wire during the night, destroyed the entrance gate, and said if we don't get what we want from the Egyptian government, we will overrun your site tomorrow' Presentation by MFO Commander Maj.-Gen. Warren Whiting to Tel Aviv University, 28 May 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZi1Bdex61k>. Incidents of gunfire near MFO bases, he said, increased from 38 in 2010 to 344 in 2011.

50 'We felt our own people would be better, until they began denouncing us for watching television.' Interview, Maysa Ayad Al-Atrash, Bedouin teacher, Sheikh Zuwayed, August 2012.

51 Interview, Salaf Bulaq, El Arish, August 2012.

52 'In post-Mubarak North Sinai, tribalism and state compete for control', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 14 June 2011.

53 The salafis declared they had recruited a 180-man armed militia to stop the trafficking. 'Neither of the two groups cares about the local community. The salafis want to increase their influence through the fight against human-trafficking and traffickers across the border with Israel want to protect their business by targeting the trade of their rival clans who smuggle fuel to Gaza.' Telephone interview, Bedouin aid worker, El Arish, 27 March 2012.

54 Interview, Mosaad Abu Fajr, Cairo, 30 March 2012.

55 Interview, NGO worker, El Arish, July 2011. Heavy fighting erupted in June between the Tayaha and Fawakhriyya clans, after the body of a prominent Tayaha militant, Salim Brake, was discovered in the desert.

56 Interview, El Arish, July 2011.

Within weeks of Mubarak's fall, the Egyptian army deployed armoured vehicles along Sinai's main roads and key intersections in its towns. As elsewhere in Egypt, its arrival in place of the internal security forces was broadly welcomed. The soldiers monitored the situation, but did not interfere. 'Unlike the police, the army don't take bribes and are hands-off,' said a Rafah resident.<sup>57</sup> Attempting to build on this foundation, the North Sinai governor – a former senior army officer – sought to recover his authority by proposing talks with tribal leaders, who formed a delegation comprised of two representatives from each of North Sinai's six major tribes. Their list of demands reflected their perception of the new balance of power: an amnesty for an estimated 10,000 'wanted' Bedouin, including all those sentenced *in absentia*; implementation of the order to release all those who had served half their sentences; confirmation of Bedouin rights to land ownership; the connection of Bedouin villages to water and electricity mains; an end to government appointment of *mukhtars* and their free election instead; state recognition of *urf* rulings; establishment of a single police force replacing multiple internal intelligence agencies; transit fees and compensation for the GASCO pipeline through tribal lands; access to jobs in government, the armed forces and local industry; and tribal participation in the restoration of law and order, and decision-making. Delegates also sought a greater say over the allocation of the budget, employment, land and investment.<sup>58</sup> In sum, the Bedouin tribes conditioned the re-establishment of an internal security presence on a new social contract.<sup>59</sup> 'We want to ensure we have a government, not a kleptocracy,' said a prominent tribal representative.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, expectations that Egypt's leadership would reverse years of state policy remained low. 'We have no confidence in their intentions,' said the representative, adding, 'If they refuse the terms, there will be chaos.'<sup>61</sup> To secure local buy-in and facilitate the renovation and staffing of El Arish's police stations, the governor proposed the recruitment of new officers through existing *mukhtars*. Some *mukhtars* acquiesced; others, fearing an attempt to resurrect the old order, warned they would resume attacks if the security forces resumed operations.<sup>62</sup> 'If the Bedouin didn't allow them [the security forces] onto the streets, they'd quickly vanish,' says a prominent Bedouin activist.<sup>63</sup> Initial interest in promises of change and development has turned to frustration and protest. Bedouin claims that Egypt's electoral process excludes them were apparently borne out in March 2012 when the national parliament selected no Bedouin representatives for the Constitutional Review Commission.<sup>64</sup> Following the defeat of local candidates in the January 2012 parliamentary elections, accusations of vote-rigging and government interference triggered a fresh round of violence. In a hitherto rare clash between South Sinai tribesmen and the security forces, armed demonstrators from the El-Mazayna and El-Qararsha tribes, whose candidates lost, ransacked government buildings in al-Tor, torched the election headquarters, forcing the victor to flee, and skirmished with police.<sup>65</sup>

The outcome of the Sinai uprising remains far from assured. The authorities have tried to fast-track the restoration of order with successive security operations (see below). At the same time, Bedouin leaders say they are electing new *mukhtars* to replace the state appointees, and claim to have revived age-old coping mechanisms, which if successful could stir demands for autonomy and separatism. 'We will re-establish our own order. We have our own law, our own people under arms, our heavy weapons brought from Sudan and our own prisons,' said a North Sinai tribal leader.<sup>66</sup> Police stations east of El Arish remained closed until the resumption of Operation Eagle in August 2012,<sup>67</sup> and attacks on checkpoints

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57 Interview, Rafah (Egyptian side), July 2011.

58 Interviews, tribal leader, El Arish, June 2011.

59 Interviews, tribal leaders, El Arish, July 2011.

60 Interview, Abu Khalid Khalaf al-Mane'a, El Arish, July 2011. On 13 August 2012, Abu Khalid was shot dead by a close relative, who was a salafi militant and opposed his support for a truce with the Egyptian authorities.

61 Interview, Abu Khalid Khalaf al-Mane'a, El Arish, July 2011.

62 Interview, NGO worker, El Arish, July 2011.

63 Interview, El Arish, July 2011.

64 'Bedouin don't consider them their elections!' Phone interview, Bedouin activist, El Arish, April 2011.

65 *Al Ahrām*, 7 January 2012.

66 Interview, El Arish, July 2011.

67 Author observation, Sheikh Zuwayed, August 2012. The police stations, however, are only partially operating, and Rafah's has yet to reopen.

in and around El Arish have resumed. Local threats to public order have grown increasingly brazen and audacious. The MFO resorted to transporting supplies by helicopter after its convoys were attacked by snipers and targeted with mines, and its base came under repeated siege.<sup>68</sup> Given the acquisition by Bedouin of sophisticated anti-air and other missiles, shipping lines in the Straits of Tiran or the Suez Canal, as well as airplanes landing at Eilat or Sharm al-Sheikh, could be vulnerable to attack. Some have weighed approaching Western powers to request that they support a new Bedouin dynasty in Sinai as they did in the Arabian Peninsula in the past, and have called on European powers to open consulates.<sup>69</sup>

The 5 August 2012 attack on the Egyptian base and Israeli frontier reveals the degree to which Egypt had become an absentee landlord. While the identities of the perpetrators remain unclear, media reports from Egypt and elsewhere have all highlighted local Bedouin involvement.<sup>70</sup> Ahead of the attack, Bedouin tribesmen warned that they would act to prevent any restoration of Egyptian security in North Sinai, and Egypt's security forces came under increasing attack.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, with incomes already in decline as a result of both dwindling tunnel receipts and Israel's construction of its Negev wall, the attack may well have been intended to reassert the military and economic supremacy of Sinai's local non-governmental actors. Some tunnel operators, sensing a threat to their revenues, may have sought to scupper attempts by Hamas and its Muslim Brotherhood supporters to open Gaza's formal overland crossings to trade.

68 'Besieging the MFO is a way for us to get our message to the world.' Interview, Mosaad Abu Fajr, Cairo, 30 March 2012. A nine-day siege in March 2012 was lifted after Egypt's authorities promised to release Bedouin prisoners convicted of perpetrating the attacks on Sinai resorts in 2005. On 14 September 2012, dozens of armed men broke into the MFO base and raised the black flag of Jihad. They demanded the withdrawal of MFO forces, adding their voice to region-wide protests by salafi groups against an anti-Muslim video by an American filmmaker. MFO helicopters reportedly feared to take off for fear of attack, trapping their personnel inside. Telephone interview, local observer, El Goura, September 2012.

69 Protestors who travelled from South Sinai to Tahrir Square called for the establishment of a Bedouin nation. Interview, foreign observer, September 2011.

70 'The incident in question was carried out mostly by Egyptians under the influence of jihadist groups: 'Who killed the Egyptian security guards in Sinai?', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 13 August 2012.

71 'Al Ahrām Investigation, Sinai's security lost despite noticeable military presence ... killing is a daily event', *Al Ahrām*, 21 June 2012. In the build-up to the 5 August 2012 attack, soldiers came under mounting fire: in South Sinai, gunmen opened fire on two police stations. 'Security source: Bedouin, police clash in Sinai', 1 dead, Reuters, 5 June 2012. An army officer was killed on 1 July on patrol in al-Hasana, Central Sinai. 'Egypt says 3 Grad missiles found in Sinai', Maan News Agency, 1 July 2012.



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## 2 Hamas and Islamist Interests in Sinai

The rise of jihadi Islamism in Sinai was not a given. Traditionally, Sinai's Bedouin had adopted a sceptical view of organized religion, perceiving it as a challenge to tribal bonds and identity. That said, Sinai's access to and ties with its neighbours exposed Sinai's indigenous population to the religious revivalist trends gaining ascendancy across its borders, and fostered a climate in which its leaders expressed their political grievances in increasingly ideological terms.

### Hamas's interests in Sinai

In the early months following its January 2006 parliamentary election victory, the Hamas government was too preoccupied with survival and day-to-day management to look much beyond the areas it controlled. But the internationalization of the forces arrayed against it stimulated a counter-outreach. Israel's closure of Gaza's supply lines by land and the intensification of its sea blockade, Egypt's parallel closure of its borders and America's severance of financial conduits prompted Gaza's Islamist leaders to seek alternative commercial, financial and military outlets. The flight of some 350 forces loyal to the Palestinian Authority's former head of preventative security in Gaza, Muhammad Dahlan, to El Arish following Hamas's military takeover of the enclave in June 2007 highlighted Sinai's attraction as a safe haven. The presence of Egypt's well-established and organized Islamist movement further helped counterbalance and challenge the powers arrayed against Hamas, and through its Egyptian-based parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, offered access to broader Islamist solidarity networks. Hamas's military takeover of Gaza intensified the polarization.

Hamas's development of trade ties with Sinai was rooted in ideology and kinship as well as economic necessity. Its leaders had consistently preached the need to prise Palestine away from Israel's economic hold, and from the first days of Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza had looked to Rafah as a gateway to establish economic, political and cultural ties with the Islamic world. Moreover, as noted, Gaza's population had family and historical ties to Sinai. Up to a third of Gaza's population has Bedouin roots, and Gazans of Bedouin origin rank prominently in the Hamas leadership. The Hamas-sanctioned expansion of Gaza's commercial ties with Sinai thus built on and restored a pre-existing relationship and interdependence.

The Mubarak regime's complicity with Israel in maintaining the siege on Hamas rule in Gaza may have further sown the seeds of a working relationship with Sinai's disgruntled Bedouin. After a global media campaign failed to dent the Mubarak regime's closure of Egypt's border with Gaza, Hamas turned proactive. In January 2008, its forces bulldozed the wall Israel had erected along the border with Egypt, ploughing a path for hundreds of thousands of Gazans to flee into Sinai and unleashing a consumer spending spree pent up by six months of siege. Egyptian forces established a cordon preventing Gazans from reaching the Suez Canal, and within ten days had pushed them back into Gaza. They subsequently erected a wall of their own, but by then Hamas had succeeded in advertising the attraction of access to Sinai's markets to a besieged population. Above ground, its forces exchanged occasional fire with Egypt's, while underground Hamas oversaw burrowing on an industrial scale, raising funds through its mosque-based charitable networks for a rapid expansion of the tunnels.

Attracted by the economic benefits as well as the prospect of family and clan unification, the population on Egypt's side of the border provided a ready reservoir of support. 'We're Palestinians working for the sake of Palestine,' said a tunnel labourer on Egypt's side of Rafah.<sup>72</sup> Within two years, capacity had increased

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<sup>72</sup> Interview, tunnel operator, Rafah (Egyptian side), July 2011.

tenfold. Fear of Egyptian detection and Israel bombing prompted tunnel owners to further improve their design, and to dig deeper and longer. Supply lines expanded so rapidly that in many instances prices fell to levels the same as or lower than pre-siege imports from Israel; without Israeli red tape and security measures, goods also arrived faster. By 2010, Sinai had replaced Israel as Gaza's prime portal for food, fuel and other essentials. Weapons arrived in growing quantities, and as trafficking conduits increased in sophistication, there was an influx of cars and construction inputs, not least Turkish cement. This facilitated the reconstruction of Gaza's battered infrastructure that the international community had failed to deliver following Israel's Cast Lead offensive of January 2009.

Even under the Mubarak regime, particularly during the Palestinian Second Intifada, Sinai had provided a conduit for the passage of weapons to Gaza.<sup>73</sup> The serial collapse of regimes in the region led to a collapse of anti-smuggling measures and facilitated ready access to arms. Coupled with tunnel expansion, this increased the potential for imports. Arms-traffickers drew on copious munitions left unguarded in Libya's arsenals, smuggling supplies through the Egyptian crossing at Salloum (reportedly bribing Egyptian security officers) and by road to Sinai.<sup>74</sup> With continued restrictions at Rafah, underground passenger traffic also increased. Under the supervision of Hamas's regulatory authority, the Tunnel Commission, tunnel operators set a fee of NIS 100 (about \$28) for the five-minute tunnel walk. Families and clans separated for years were reunited, visiting relatives for supper. Such was the turnaround in the economy that Gaza's newly opened hotels, restaurants and beach cafés even attracted custom from North Sinai.<sup>75</sup>

The growing economic dependence of Sinai's population on informal trade with Gaza – by 2009 it had become the mainstay of North Sinai's Bedouin – provided Hamas with the soft power to project its influence into Sinai. In addition to Gaza's economic, social and cultural pull, the disintegration of Egypt's security regime and parallel increase in Gaza's military capabilities offered Hamas an opportunity to achieve strategic depth in Egypt and further bolstered its emergence as a centre of power. In a sign of Hamas's growing reach, some Palestinian businessmen opted to launder their tunnel profits through a rash of land speculation in and around El Arish, prompting a spike in land prices. Gazans were alleged to be seeking to export not only their earnings but also their arsenals to Sinai for safekeeping.

Ever since Egypt's authorities blamed the 2004–06 bombing of South Sinai's tourist resorts on Palestinian Islamists, they have viewed the growing strength of Hamas with alarm. They claimed that suicide bombings, hitherto unknown in Sinai, drew on know-how honed in the Second Intifada. In May 2006 the authorities arrested three Palestinians, said to be Hamas members, on suspicion of aiding al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, the armed group accused of the bombing. Further straining relations with the newly elected Hamas government, Egypt claimed that at least one of the group's militants had obtained explosives in Gaza.<sup>76</sup> It also accused Hamas of offering the perpetrators a safe haven.<sup>77</sup> Throughout Mubarak's last years, Egyptian officials publicly reiterated their concerns that Hamas was fostering militancy in Sinai.<sup>78</sup> Both Israel and Egypt accused the Jama'at Jaysh Al-Islam (the Army of Islam) – a Gaza-based militant

73 According to Israel's internal intelligence agency, the Shin Bet, 'hundreds of rockets (mostly with ranges of 20–40 kilometres), about 1,000 mortar shells, dozens of individual anti-tank missiles and tons of explosives and explosives-making materials have been smuggled via this route since 2010'. Israel Army website, 14 May 2011, <http://dover.idf.il/NR/exeres/779A0079-A3CE-40D0-8794-D13EB8AABF7D.htm>.

74 Israel's media reported scores of Grad rockets with a range of 60–70 kilometres and shorter-range weapons had been smuggled from Libya to the Gaza Strip via Egypt. 'Hundreds of Grad rockets smuggled from Libya to Gaza', *Maariv*, 10 June 2011. Stolen land-cruisers from Libya came too – so quickly that Gazans joked that 'the blood is still fresh on the seats'. Interview, car showroom salesmen, Gaza, July 2011. See also 'Smuggled Libyan weapons flood into Egypt', *Washington Post*, 13 October 2011.

75 'It's nearer and cheaper than Alexandria, and the girls are trendier'. Interview, Rafah (Egyptian side) resident aged 23, July 2011.

76 "'Gaza Link' to Egypt bombings', BBC News, 23 May 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle\\_east/5009170.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/5009170.stm).

77 Egyptian intelligence chief General Omar Suleiman presented Hamas's Interior Minister Said Siam with documents detailing the plot behind the Sinai attacks and the confessions of three Hamas members. Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas. The Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 176–77.

78 On 29 December 2009, Egypt's legal affairs minister Mufid Shihab listed a series of alleged attempts to infiltrate Sinai via Gaza's tunnels in order to perpetrate attacks on tourist sites in Egypt. They included a Palestinian and Egyptian member of Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad militant group with two explosive belts, two Hamas members planning terrorist operations in Sinai and an Islamic Jihad cell planning a suicide bombing using an explosive belt. 'Shiab: Gaza tunnels threaten Egypt's security', *Al-Youm al-Saba*, 29 December 2009, <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=171788>.

group led by the scion of a Gaza-based Bedouin clan, the Dughmush – of acting as a Hamas surrogate, intent on using Sinai as a theatre to attack Israel and the Nile Delta.<sup>79</sup>

But once in power, the Hamas authorities rapidly sought to reposition themselves as guardians of regional stability, subject to the proviso that they were allowed to govern. Hamas used its bloody assaults on salafi-jihadi groups inside Gaza, particularly the elimination of one of their key centres on the border with Egypt in August 2009, to flaunt its security and credentials with the region's regimes, and advertise the benefits of its inclusion in the region's security architecture. As early as October 2007, Hamas reportedly extradited to Egypt an Al-Qaeda leader hiding in Gaza, who was suspected of involvement in tourist attacks in South Sinai.<sup>80</sup> Intent on establishing a new trade and political relationship with Egypt in the wake of Mubarak's ousting, Hamas offered logistical assistance to Egyptian troops on the southern side of the border.<sup>81</sup> Tentative at first, coordination expanded significantly after the fall of Mubarak. Hamas security officials say they repeatedly used their leverage over Bedouin clans to assuage the unrest. And in a significant reversal of roles Hamas took steps to insulate Gaza's borders against a spillover of Sinai's turbulence and an influx of jihadi-salafis who might bolster their internal opposition.

While Israel portrayed the alliance between Hamas and its parent organization the Muslim Brotherhood, newly ensconced in Egypt's corridors of power, as a threat to regional stability, Gaza's rulers looked first and foremost to the benefits of these ties for political and economic security. Hamas leaders expressed hopes that their government might supplant the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah as the official Palestinian representatives, and earn a place as Egypt's strategic ally on its northeast border.<sup>82</sup> Hamas ministers drew up feasibility studies for future cooperation aimed at reversing years of economic deterioration caused by war and siege, and sought to formalize their economic relations with Egypt in return for a closure of the tunnel complex.<sup>83</sup> Proposals hitherto frustrated by the Mubarak regime included Gaza's linkage to the regional electricity grid connecting Egypt to Syria and to the gas pipeline supplying Israel and Jordan; the resumption of direct overland trade and a free-trade zone straddling the border; and a coastal highway serviced by bus routes stretching from Gaza to Morocco.<sup>84</sup> To this end, the Hamas prime minister visited Egypt's new president, Mohammed Morsy, in July 2012 only a week before the 5 August attack. The two men discussed the reopening of the Egyptian consulate, the linkage of Gaza to Egypt's electricity grid, the transformation of trade ties from underground to above ground, and the easing of travel restrictions for Palestinians. In the wake of the meeting, numbers crossing through Rafah tripled to 1,500 per day.<sup>85</sup> The political capital was even greater. By hosting Haniya but not the PA prime minister in the West Bank, Salam Fayyad, Morsy not only gave a critical boost to the former's legitimacy and regional standing, but demonstrated Egypt's increasing regard for Gaza over the PA's West Bank – a

79 In its last days, the Mubarak regime accused the group of bombing a church in Alexandria, killing 23 Copts. 'Egypt's interior minister says authorities arrest 19 Arabs with suspected links to al-Qaida', Associated Press, 25 January 2011. A church in Rafah also came under attack on 5 February 2011. 'Egypt blames Gaza militants for church bomb', Reuters, 23 January 2011. The Army of Islam denied the allegations but praised the attacks. However, some Egyptian analysts were sceptical, and Egypt's state prosecutor reportedly considered investigating the Interior Ministry for complicity in the attack. 'Egypt says Gaza militants were behind New Year's church bomb', *Wall Street Journal*, 24 January 2011. In November 2010, Israel killed two Jaysh al-Islam members in missile strikes on Gaza, saying they were seeking to kidnap Israelis or attack US targets in Sinai in cooperation with Hamas. Israel Defense Forces Blog, 17 November 2010.

80 The handover was reportedly part of a deal to allow dozens of Hamas political and military leaders stranded in Sinai to return to Gaza through the closed Rafah border crossing. '85 allowed through Rafah crossing due to secret deal between Hamas and Egypt', Maan News Agency, 1 October 2007.

81 'Palestinian escape stories', *Al Ahrum Weekly*, 10 February 2011.

82 'Under the Mubarak regime, Egypt was Israel's strategic depth. Under the new administration, that is no longer the case. There's a new policy in the presidency' Interview, Mahmoud Zahar, Gaza City, July 2012.

83 'If Egypt lifts the siege and allows trade above ground, we will destroy these tunnels and all illicit traffic across the borders' Interview, Hamas interior ministry spokesman Ihab Ghussein, Gaza City, 8 August 2012. 'Once we have a trade route above ground, we will close the tunnels underground' Interview, Mahmoud Zahar, Gaza City, July 2012.

84 Interviews, Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar, Hamas government economy minister Ala Refati and agriculture minister Mahmoud al-Agha, December 2011 and February 2012. In February 2012, Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and the Egyptian government announced progress on a three-stage plan to formalize energy supplies to Gaza and connect it to Egypt's electricity grid and gas pipelines. Interview, PA Energy Authority chairman, Omar Kittaneh, Ramallah, February 2012; Islamic Development Bank consultant, Gaza, February 2012.

85 'Haniyeh: Rafah to open 12 hrs daily', Maan News Agency, 28 July 2012.

volte-face from the Mubarak era.<sup>86</sup> Hamas leaders were fully cognizant that resurgent conflict with Israel either through direct confrontation or indirectly through Sinai would not only threaten these gains, it would jeopardize ties between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, which was keen to consolidate its hold and focus on domestic recovery.

That said, the collapse of Egypt's security regime and Israel's economic retreat from Sinai, coupled with the rise of Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas influence, undoubtedly created space for the growth of Islamism in the peninsula. While Hamas's leadership has every interest in convincing Egypt of its ability to operate as a state actor in Gaza, particularly as it fears that the loss of its Syrian patronage would render it more dependent than ever on Egypt, some activists may have pursued multiple agendas, given the movement's multiple wings and broad range of ideologies. The salafi stream within Hamas, which is particularly prevalent in the military wing, may also have enhanced coordination with its Sinai counterparts,<sup>87</sup> particularly after Hamas's crackdown in 2009 prompted jihadi operatives to flee to Sinai.

Sinai offered obvious advantages as a rear base for Islamists. Egyptian security officials consistently claimed that some jihadi militants wanted by Hamas, including members of the Army of Islam, had transferred their operations to the peninsula, to prove their continued commitment to the armed struggle for Palestine without overtly threatening Hamas's ceasefire with Israel along Gaza's frontier. Operations in Sinai afforded greater protection from Israeli attack, given Israel's reluctance to violate Egyptian sovereignty and its intelligence capabilities which were lower in the peninsula than in Gaza. Attacks on Israel from Egyptian soil offered the prospect of hastening the erosion of the peace treaty between the two countries. Finally, a security presence in Sinai offered Hamas an indirect and deniable means to exercise leverage against a weakened Egyptian regime, for instance on such issues as opening the Rafah crossing to Hamas cadres, or simply to be taken seriously by Egypt's decision-makers. In the wake of Israel's 2008–09 winter offensive against Gaza, some Hamas leaders allegedly sought refuge in Sinai, and the Qassam Brigades reportedly relocated some of their military assets and production there.<sup>88</sup> According to Gaza officials monitoring the tunnel traffic, the movement of scrap metal to Sinai for smelting and reimport to Gaza is primarily intended for the manufacture of iron rods for construction, which Israel tightly restricts, but it may also have dual uses.<sup>89</sup> Hamas militants allegedly participated in the storming of Egypt's prisons during the January 2011 mass uprising – an indicator of their clout. And in mid-2012, Egyptian, Israeli and US officials all claimed that Gaza militants repeatedly used Sinai's expanse as a military testing ground for their missiles.<sup>90</sup>

So pronounced did Hamas's ties with Sinai seem that some argued the Islamist movement was unwittingly serving an Israeli agenda, not only of reorientating Gaza into Egypt's orbit and out of the Palestinian equation, but of resettling Palestinian refugees in Sinai. Notwithstanding Hamas's profuse avowals of respect for Egypt's sovereignty, the extensive Palestinian investment in El Arish, Palestinian offers of assistance to develop Sinai's agriculture and the large numbers of Gazans asserting their Egyptian nationality – among them veteran Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar – all compounded suspicions.

The 5 August killing of Egypt's soldiers marked a watershed in Hamas's double-edged approach to Sinai. Facing allegations that Palestinians from Gaza had been implicated in an attack occurring less than a kilometre from its borders, and that the militants who perpetrated it might have relied on the tunnel complex to enter or exit, Hamas dispensed with any ambivalence. Its leaders unilaterally suspended

86 PA officials reacted to the volte-face with consternation. The Egyptian leadership 'is dealing with Hamas as if it is the representative of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, ignoring the role of the Palestinian Authority (PA). It is negotiating with the Hamas government about security affairs, the Rafah crossing and conditions relating to the people, including issues of electricity, medicine, smuggling tunnels and commercial traffic.' Interview, official, Ramallah, August 2012.

87 Palestinian Authority officials highlighted the ties between Hamas and other armed Islamist groups. 'Hamas is the incubator of extremist groups.' Interview, Tayib Abdel Rahim, Ramallah, August 2012.

88 Ehud Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, No. 9, January 2012, p. 6.

89 'Hamas sets up rocket production line in Sinai', *Jerusalem Post*, 11 December 2011. Egypt dismissed the report as 'fabricated'. 'Egypt denies presence of Hamas missile bases in Sinai', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 11 December 2011.

90 Interviews, Tel Aviv and El Arish, July–August 2012. 'We could hear it going overhead.' Presentation by MFO Commander Maj.-Gen. Warren Whiting to Tel Aviv University, 28 May 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZi1Bdex61k>. He said the Iranian-made Fajr-5 missile landed 26 kilometres south of his base in El-Gorah, itself some 26 kilometres from the Gaza border.

operations at the tunnel complex. Prime Minister Haniya led Ramadan prayers at the closed gates of the Egyptian consulate, accompanied by thousands of followers. Qassam Brigade leaders publicly committed not to use Egyptian soil as a back door to attack Israel.<sup>91</sup> And security officials offered to embark on full intelligence-sharing and security coordination with their Egyptian counterparts.<sup>92</sup> The limited operational freedom Hamas had hitherto given some salafi groups, be it to launch attacks on Israel or transit through the tunnels to Sinai,<sup>93</sup> in exchange for a tacit agreement not to challenge Hamas's control internally, was sharply curtailed. Hamas reportedly arrested over 30 alleged members of armed salafi groups, prompting protests from their spokesmen.<sup>94</sup> Other suspects, including Hisham Saidini, whom Egypt's media cited as a Gaza-based founder of Tawhid wal-Jihad, were held under house arrest.<sup>95</sup>

### The penetration of jihadi Islamism

Chary of a movement they regarded as urban, hostile to tribal solidarity (*asabiya*) and bent on replacing a tribal brotherhood with a religious one, the Bedouin's embrace of Islamism was far from guaranteed.<sup>96</sup> Loyalties to Sufism among an older Bedouin generation, anathema to salafis, run strong, since Sufis had been instrumental in promoting an earlier Islamic revival in Sinai in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>97</sup> But the Bedouin's shared experience of Egyptian jail with salafis, a separatist spirit enhanced by opposition to the old security regime, and the new economic opportunities all appear to have helped forge a common outlook, which continued after the February 2011 jailbreak.<sup>98</sup>

Topography, too, played a role. While protests in mountainous South Sinai remained more tribal in nature, activism in the accessible coastal plains of North Sinai took a more Islamist form. Even before Mubarak's fall, anti-regime Islamists chased out of Gaza by Hamas or out of the Nile Valley by the Egyptian authorities found refuge in Sinai's more expansive, mountainous hinterland an hour's drive south of El Arish, beyond state control, where they sought the protection of Bedouin tribes. After his escape from prison in 2008, Salim Abu Lafi, a salafi ideologue from Sinai's Tarabeen tribe, found refuge in its tribal lands of Jabal al-Halal, the mountainous outcrop south of El Arish. He quickly became a magnet for Bedouin and Nile Valley salafi dissidents, melding salafi thought with tribal loyalties and grievances. Resentment of central government and Israel's curtailment of the smuggling conduits to Sinai neatly dovetailed with Islamist discourse. As in Gaza, preachers lambasted the apostate Pharaoh in Cairo and the tourist services it encouraged, disparaged as 'entertaining the devil'. Graffiti daubed on the court in Sheikh Zuwayed declared, 'Decisions are for God alone.'

Salafi groups that had maintained a low profile before Mubarak's fall quickly resurfaced afterwards. Though debutants in the mainstream political arena and opposed by local jihadi forces for supplanting God's will with man's, salafi political movements based in the Nile Valley demonstrated how well organized and

91 Hamas rally attended by author, Gaza City, 6 August 2012. To deflect responsibility for the attack, Hamas sought to accuse Israel. 'Gaza was starting to smell the breath of freedom, and Israel didn't like it. They wanted Egypt to keep the siege on the border.' Interview, Ihab Ghussein, Hamas interior ministry spokesman, Gaza City, 8 August 2012.

92 'Since the attack, Gaza has taken the initiative offering to share intelligence, close the tunnels and prevent any infiltration.' Interview, Hamas security official, Gaza City, 8 August 2012.

93 Hamas parliamentarians had warned for months that Hamas security forces were losing control of the few dozen tunnels east of the Rafah terminal that lay inside Israel's self-declared buffer zone and were hence off limits to them. Huda Naim, the deputy head of Hamas's parliamentary monitoring committee, warned that weapons, untaxed cigarettes and militants crossed with near impunity through these eastern tunnels. Interview, Naim, Bureij Camp, November 2011.

94 'Haniya demands strengthening of security measures with Egypt', *Al-Hayat*, 5 September 2012. 'Hamas pursuing Salafists from "street to street"', *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 6 September 2012. In a further sign of the government's readiness to act against salafi members within the movement a Hamas-run tribunal tried and convicted in September 2012 two Interior Ministry employees to lengthy prison terms for kidnapping and murdering an Italian aid worker in March 2011. 'Hamas court convicts four in Italian activist death', Associated Press, 17 September 2012.

95 'Al Ahrām Investigation, Sinai's security lost despite noticeable military presence ... killing is a daily event', *Al Ahrām*, 21 June 2012. Hamas had released Saidini, aka Abu Walid al-Maqdisi, from prison three days before the 5 August attack, insisting that he had abandoned his jihadi ideology. In a meeting with the author, attended by his followers while under semi-house arrest, however, he insisted that the attack was justified if 'the Egyptian soldiers [at the border] had been defending Jews'. Interview, Bureij Camp, 7 August 2012.

96 For instance, the Tayaha, whose tribal domains span much of central Sinai, are widely reputed to shun fasting during Ramadan. Interview, local businessman, El Arish, July 2011.

97 Interview, Sufi sheikh, Touma, August 2012.

98 They included Ali Abu Faris, convicted for involvement in the Sharm al-Sheikh bombings that killed 88 people in 2005.

well funded they were by mustering a strong campaign ahead of Sinai's elections on 3 January 2012. Egyptian security officials attributed their prevalence to foreign, primarily Saudi, funding.<sup>99</sup> Their candidates attracted strong support at the polls.<sup>100</sup>

For their part salafi groups based in Sinai adopted a more jihadi posture, achieving an ever greater impact. Prisoners convicted of Islamist militancy, who had escaped from Egypt's jails during the Revolution, reportedly found a safe haven in Sinai, strengthening the peninsula's pre-existing radical salafi base.<sup>101</sup> With scant state security to impede their passage, *Al-Daawa wal-Sunna* and other salafi groups ventured from the hinterland into the coastal towns, establishing a niche by forming neighbourhood committees and offering fledgling Sharia courts as an alternative judicial process in the wake of the collapse of the central authority. Once established, they repeatedly flexed their muscles to gain greater sway over Bedouin communities. To significant approval from local youth, Sufi shrines, which salafi puritans deemed saint- and ancestor-worship and thus an abomination of their uncompromising monotheism, came under attack in May 2011. While salafi operatives running the security committee in El Arish claim to have sheltered the city's small Christian community, the church in Rafah was burnt. Salafi groups also circulated leaflets admonishing Bedouin not to vote in the parliamentary elections.<sup>102</sup>

Jihadi hostility towards external neighbouring powers perceived as non-Muslim or collaborationist largely mirrored the plight of Bedouin trade relations as Israel and to a lesser extent the Egyptian government sought to cut the smuggling conduits. As noted above, salafi sheikhs in Rafah on the Egyptian side of the border amassed a militia drawn from three tribes bordering Gaza that controlled much of the fuel-smuggling and led an armed campaign against human-trafficking. In March 2012, the same group also sent 300 armed followers to lay siege to El-Gorah, the former Israeli airfield in Sinai that is the MFO base.<sup>103</sup> It then vowed to lay siege to the MFO again if the authorities reneged on an agreement to release five Bedouin jihadis convicted by a military tribunal of perpetrating the 2005 bombing in Sharm el-Sheikh.<sup>104</sup>

Further asserting their dominance,<sup>100</sup> salafi militiamen performed a show of force through El Arish on 29 June 2011, riding armed on motorbikes and in landcruisers, waving black flags, briefly taking over the town and attacking its police station. Four days later, after the North Sinai pipeline had again been sabotaged, leaflets circulated in El Arish claiming Al Qaeda had opened a new chapter in the Sinai Peninsula (AQSP). In June 2011, the Islamist group Takfir wal-Hijra, which considered governments not subject to its dictate to be infidel, also announced the establishment of an Islamic state of Sinai. Mixing jihadi with local separatist rhetoric, the leaflets declared an Islamic emirate in Sinai and ordained the implementation of Sharia law, and demanded revocation of Egypt's treaties with Israel and Egyptian military intervention against Israel on behalf of the Palestinians in Gaza.<sup>105</sup> The following month, in an attempt to achieve this last demand, militants perpetrated their largest operation up to then, conducting a cross-border raid 20 kilometres north of Taba, igniting a fire-fight between Israeli and Egyptian forces, and bringing the Israeli–Egyptian strategic relationship to its lowest ebb in 30 years. In October 2011, Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri posted a statement praising the border attack and the gas pipeline sabotage, and in December 2011 a new group called Ansar al-Jihad emerged and claimed Al-Qaeda affiliation.

The allegations are hard to corroborate independently. Over the following months, jihadi groups continued to claim responsibility for sabotage acts in North Sinai,<sup>106</sup> but for all their prowess there are few further signs of an Al-Qaeda state, or even a coherent, armed Islamist movement in the peninsula.

99 Interview, Egyptian security official, January 2012.

100 Salafi politicians won two of Sinai's 12 seats. The Brotherhood won five, and pro-Mubarak candidates won two.

101 'Former detainees, not recruits, stiffen Sinai jihad', Reuters, 15 September 2011.

102 Interview, Bedouin aid worker, El-Gorah, August 2012.

103 Presentation by MFO Commander Maj.-Gen. Warren Whiting to Tel Aviv University, 28 May 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZ1Eb6x61k>.

104 The MFO have since reinforced the base with five-metre-high barbed wire and watch-towers with bullet-proof glass, but appear to have sharply restricted their movements. 'The MFO can't do anything anymore. All they are doing are protecting themselves.' Interview, Bedouin activist living near their base, El-Gorah, August 2012.

105 Pamphlet dated 2 August 2011 distributed in El Arish entitled 'A Statement from Al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula'. Reported in Andrew McGregor, 'Has Al-Qaeda Opened a New Chapter in the Sinai Peninsula?', Jamestown Foundation, 17 August 2011.

106 In December 2011, a group calling itself Ansar al-Jihad circulated leaflets in North Sinai claiming responsibility for the pipeline attacks and professing its allegiance to 'the martyr Imam Usama Bin Laden'. 'Egypt detains new suspect in gas pipeline bombing', *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 27 December 2011.

Rather, their organization appears as inchoate as Bedouin networks. It may also be that Bedouin activists highlighted the salafi-jihadi threat to increase their leverage *vis-à-vis* the Egyptian authorities.<sup>107</sup> Egyptian officials have questioned the authenticity of the statements, preferring to blame the instability on other foreign militants. North Sinai's governor denied a claim published in *Al-Hayat* that over 400 Al-Qaeda members had found refuge in Sinai, but he maintained that Hamas, Hezbollah and salafi cells composed of Palestinians, Bedouin and foreign Arabs were all 'planning to carry out terror attacks in Egypt'.<sup>108</sup> Egyptian security officials had previously accused Hezbollah of sending militants to Sinai, seeking shelter in the central Sinai town of al-Nakhl.<sup>109</sup> A US diplomatic dispatch, published by Wikileaks, cited Iranian efforts to recruit Bedouin for arms-smuggling into Gaza.<sup>110</sup> Recent attacks and statements by groups operating from Sinai against Israel have further exposed foreign footprints. In a statement placed on the internet, a Sinai-based group calling itself the Mujahedeen Shura Council of Jerusalem claimed ties to Al-Qaeda and ascribed responsibility to Osama bin Laden for the attacks on the trans-Sinai pipeline and a June 2012 attack across the Sinai border near the Israeli kibbutz of Kadesh Barnea, in which a Saudi national was killed.<sup>111</sup>

Prospects for a full-scale showdown intensified in the wake of the 5 August 2012 killing of 16 Egyptian soldiers and the assault on Israel's border fortifications. As Egypt sent its tanks into the salafi heartlands inside Area C<sup>112</sup> and launched limited operations against militant hideouts, salafi leaders staged public rallies, warning the security forces against repeating past practice and demanding the release of all security detainees.<sup>113</sup> More militant groups published statements threatening to target Egyptian army soldiers participating in the military campaign.<sup>114</sup> Sniper and rocket-propelled-grenade attacks on Egyptian government positions increased. Though outnumbered following Egypt's positioning of hardware and personnel in North Sinai, bands of armed groups gained the upper hand in increasingly brazen attacks on government forces. Eyewitnesses reported seeing militants in two landcruisers putting rout to 30 government armoured cars, and across North Sinai, salafi groups succeeded in mounting simultaneous attacks on multiple fronts. Drawn by their seeming success, increasing numbers of young Bedouin reportedly supported or joined their ranks.<sup>115</sup>

107 'It's a good way of blackmailing. If you don't deal with us, you get al-Qaeda.' Interview, analyst, El Arish, July 2011.

108 Interview, North Sinai governor, El Arish, July 2011. North Sinai security chief General Saleh al-Masry claimed that three of the 12 suspected militants arrested in connection with the 29 July attack were Palestinians. 'Officials: Egypt to target al Qaeda cells said to be training in Sinai', CNN, 12 August 2011.

109 'Egypt says 10 Lebanese hiding in Sinai', Associated Press, 13 April 2009. Former Interior Minister Habib al-Adly repeated such allegations during his trial. 'Hamas leader denies group stirred unrest during 25 January uprising', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 24 February 2012.

110 'WikiLeaks: Iran tried to recruit Sinai Bedouin to smuggle arms into Gaza', Reuters, 16 December 2010.

111 See 'BICOM Analysis: Disturbing indicators in the Gaza-Sinai-Israel escalation', BICOM, 25 June 2012.

112 See page 17 and Appendix A.

113 'We won't allow State Security back. We won't allow random arrests. We won't let them oppress and persecute us ever again.' Asad Khairy Bek, salafi leader in El Arish, speaking at rally in Sheikh Zuwayed attended by the author, 11 August 2012. If the authorities refused to release militants arrested in the campaign, he warned, a new insurgency would ensue.

114 'Islamists in Egypt condemn alleged "salafist jihadist" threat', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 21 August 2012.

115 'Young people are fighting with the militants. They are growing very quickly, because people think they are making progress. In my own village, the numbers of armed salafis have grown from 10 to 40 people in one month.' Telephone interview, Bedouin aid worker near Sheikh Zuwayed, September 2012.

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## 3 Egyptian Policy

Perhaps for the first time since Israel's withdrawal 30 years earlier, the August 2012 killing of 16 Egyptian soldiers elevated North Sinai from a peripheral backwater to centre stage in Egyptian consciousness. Egyptians awoke to the reality of a security vacuum that three decades of lacklustre efforts had failed to fill.

Egyptian strategists and nationalists perceived the peninsula as a bridge to the Arab heartlands, and a base from which to project their country's influence eastwards. But their path was hampered by the Camp David accords. Although these provided for the stationing of 22,000 Egyptian troops and 230 tanks in the western half of the peninsula, restrictions on military deployment elsewhere turned Sinai's most populated areas in the north and the key resorts in the south into demilitarized zones. The posting of an international force, the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), to monitor Egypt's borders with Israel and Gaza further limited Egypt's freedom of movement, requiring intrusive inspections down to the last bullet.<sup>116</sup> With Egypt prevented from introducing more than light weapons into Area B, just east of El Arish, and limited to a police force in Area C, Egyptian soldiers found themselves rapidly outgunned by local forces.

Hamstrung in the border region militarily, the Egyptian authorities resorted to filling the vacuum with a police state, mass settlement and manpower-intensive economic projects, particularly tourism in the south and agro-businesses and industry in the north.<sup>117</sup> Despite American aid to finance development, a result of the Camp David agreement, Egypt fell short of its initial target to relocate five million inhabitants from the Nile Valley to the peninsula. Yet within two decades, South Sinai was attracting over 2.5 million tourists annually, and Egyptians in their tens of thousands moved there attracted by job prospects and internal tourism, including time-share holiday homes.

Even this proved insufficient, however, to meet growing internal and external threats to Egypt's hold on the peninsula. The Nile Valley migrants' preferential access to land, irrigation and jobs exacerbated tensions with local Bedouin, igniting the 2004–06 wave of bombings on resorts, which threatened Egypt's tourism revenue as well as relations with Israel and Western donors. Israel's disengagement from Gaza in 2005 strengthened Hamas, heightening the risks of a spill-over of the Arab–Israeli conflict into Sinai, and offering an alternative centre of gravity for Sinai's indigenous population.

Egypt's counter-measures faced mixed results. Internally, repression only heightened Bedouin alienation and discontent.<sup>118</sup> Externally, the Mubarak regime sought to reverse Hamas's 2007 military takeover by encouraging intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which it hoped would return Palestinian Authority forces to Gaza. In the meantime, Egypt joined Israel in imposing a hermetic seal on Gaza and erecting an overland wall. The Mubarak regime thus drove Bedouin and Gazans to operate literally underground, further reducing its ability to combat penetration by armed transnational jihadi groups. Steps to impound goods and in some cases personnel heading for the tunnels, raiding holding facilities used for storage of tunnel-bound consignments, and sabotaging tunnel infrastructure all failed to stem the traffic.<sup>119</sup>

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116 'It is the most detailed agreement you can imagine. I've been out on a mission where people are literally counting how many pistols, how many rifles, how many sandbags, how many water-trucks.' Presentation by MFO Commander Maj.-Gen. Warren Whiting to Tel Aviv University, 28 May 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZi1Bdex61k>.

117 Close associates of President Mubarak secured monopolies and highly preferential commercial terms for land purchases and security force deployment for land clearance. Hassan Rateb was the most prominent investor in North Sinai. A member of the NDP's policies committee and owner of the pro-regime satellite network, *Al-Mehwar*, he established the province's premier resort, al-Sama, its only university and its cement factory. Interviews, El Arish, August 2012. See 'The state of Sinai: backyard for business bandits', *Al-Akhbar*, 22 August 2012.

118 Mubarak appointed a new North Sinai governor, replacing Munir Shash who had promoted Bedouin rights and opposed the security dragnet. 'Police considered every resident a terrorist' Quoted in 'Q&A with Mouneer Shash, former North Sinai governor', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 25 July 2010.

119 Interviews, Rafah, April 2010. In the first eight months of 2010, the Egyptian authorities claimed to have closed nearly 600 tunnels by detonating their mouths, plugging entrances with solid waste or sand and flooding passages with sewage. 'Egypt intensifies clampdown on smuggling tunnels', *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 18 December 2010. Dozens of deaths were recorded as a result of the destruction, and use of tear gas by Egyptian security forces inside the tunnels. 'Hamas: Egypt gasses 4 smugglers', Associated Press, 29 April 2010. Egypt's authorities denied the claims.



Under pressure from the United States and Israel in the wake of Israel's January 2009 invasion of Gaza, Egypt intensified curbs on Gaza's smuggling conduits, beginning work in mid-2009 on the installation of a steel barrier extending 25 metres underground along the length of its border with Gaza.<sup>120</sup> But the plans were half-baked. Egypt cited logistical difficulties, including stony ground, which reportedly hindered the hammering of steel plates deeper than four metres into the ground.<sup>121</sup> Tunnel operators used welding torches to cut hundreds of holes in those sections of the barrier that had been completed, or they dug deeper tunnels, nullifying the multi-million-dollar project at a cost of a few thousand dollars.<sup>122</sup> But stemming the traffic was as much a political as a technical issue. Tunnel operators have claimed that very senior officials in Cairo as well as petty local ones were profiteering from the traffic.<sup>123</sup> And often the counter-measures appeared token. Security officials targeted tunnels that were easiest to detect, and closest to the border and the surface, leaving more developed and profitable ones untouched. The Egyptian government's political will to enforce the siege was further eroded by the denunciation of Mubarak's policies by Islamist groups worldwide in support of Hamas, which by extension challenged the legitimacy of his regime.

Unable to reverse Hamas's military takeover of Gaza, the Mubarak regime increasingly accepted the *fait accompli*. It established a *modus operandi* with the Hamas authorities, *de facto* coordinating passage of Palestinians leaving Gaza with their interior ministry (Egyptian security officials screened lists provided by Hamas), and allowing goods traffic to flow – mostly unimpeded and at a price – underground. Following Mubarak's downfall, official impediments to underground traffic largely disappeared, and the country's military rulers, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), further relaxed restrictions on overland passenger traffic. Egypt's then head of military intelligence, Murad Mouwafi, also sought to continue the efforts of his predecessor, Omar Suleiman, to negotiate an intra-Palestinian reconciliation agreement, which would restore President Mahmoud Abbas's authority over Gaza. He succeeded in cajoling Fatah and Hamas leaders into an initial agreement in May 2011.

The central hold over Sinai, which had begun to unravel before Mubarak fell from power, collapsed altogether with his ousting. In an attempt to regain lost ground, the post-Mubarak authorities resumed a dialogue initiated earlier by Interior Minister Habib al-Adly, himself a former deputy interior minister for Sinai affairs and Suez, who met tribal elders in June 2010, and released some 200 political activists.<sup>124</sup> North Sinai's then governor, General Abdel Wahhab al-Mabruk, constrained inside his own headquarters, sought to re-establish his authority through dialogue.<sup>125</sup> In talks with local tribal leaders in June 2011, he undertook to ease restrictions on Bedouin entry to the armed forces, provide government jobs (particularly in the security forces), to release a few hundred prisoners including those who had served at least half their terms, and to transfer resources for social investment including a new state university. The South Sinai governor, General Khaled Fouda, further declared the sale of state land would be open to Bedouin as well as other residents, suggesting that a resolution would be found to the Bedouin's lack of official registered title-deeds to the land.<sup>126</sup> General Sami Anan, Egypt's chief-of-staff and the second-in-command of the SCAF, held a rare meeting with tribal elders in El Arish's military club in August 2011. He undertook to issue a decree licensing Bedouin land ownership in Sinai and revisit files of 285 Bedouin sentenced *in absentia*.<sup>127</sup> The authorities also undertook to establish a National Authority for the Development of the Sinai Peninsula, whose tasks would include construction of a railway and a canal to

120 'A matter of national security', *The Egyptian Gazette*, 12 January 2010. Interview, tunnel operator, Rafah, April 2010.

121 'Gaza tunnel smugglers cutting through Egypt's wall', Associated Press, 22 July 2010. By the time of the scheduled date of completion a year later, only half the length had been dug. 'Egypt denies gassing Gaza's tunnels', Associated Press, 29 April 2010.

122 'Gazans cut through Egypt's border barrier', BBC Online, 6 May 2010; Frustrated, the US engineers abandoned the project in mid-2011 with only four kilometres complete. 'US tunnel detection system left unfinished', Maan News Agency, 8 June 2010. Interview, tunnel operator, Rafah, April 2010.

123 Interviews, Rafah, April 2010.

124 They included Mosaad Abu Fajr, a prominent Bedouin activist.

125 Interview, El Arish, July 2011. The governor complained that civil police only ventured out under military escort.

126 'Egypt plans to populate border areas near Israel, Libya', *WorldTribune.com*, 20 November 2011.

127 'Egypt's Wild West', CNN, 24 August 2011. Six months later, *Al-Ahram* reported that the authorities quashed three death sentences against Bedouin convicted of involvement in the 2004–05 bombings, and undertook to quash the convictions of 130 others. However, it added, hundreds remained imprisoned without trial. 'Break in Sinai', *Al-Ahram*, 22 February 2012.

supply water to central Sinai.<sup>128</sup> Plans were unveiled to connect Egypt to the Arabian Peninsula with a \$3 billion bridge extending 32 kilometres across the Red Sea from Sinai to Tabuk in Saudi Arabia, with work set to begin in 2013.<sup>129</sup> For the first time, Egypt's military training college in Cairo began accepting Bedouin recruits from Sinai.<sup>130</sup>

That said, many Bedouin complained that changes on the ground largely failed to materialize. The launch of the Sinai Development Authority was repeatedly delayed.<sup>131</sup> Changes to enable the registration of Bedouin title to the land proved similarly slow, hiring at the MFO base remained unchanged, and there were few early signs of investment by the Sinai Development Authority.<sup>132</sup> Repeatedly, political engagement encountered institutional opposition from the security apparatus, which hankered after the old order and seemed no less sclerotic than under Mubarak.<sup>133</sup> In May 2012, the government appointed a former intelligence general, Shawky Rashwan, to head the National Authority for the Development of the Sinai Peninsula, suggesting that in much of the state apparatus the military mindset prevailed. 'We're not in the business of legitimizing smugglers, terrorists, drug barons and outlaws,' said an Egyptian intelligence officer, citing soaring rates of car-theft.<sup>134</sup> The natural allies of the security forces – Sinai residents of Nile Valley origin – also expressed growing nervousness at the failure to fill the security vacuum, and staged protests in North and South Sinai.<sup>135</sup> Incapacity is another factor. Egypt's ministers seemed too preoccupied with managing the Nile Valley and too short of finance to address the needs of the Sinai Bedouin.

Finally, Egypt's new mainstream Islamist forces often seemed as centralist in their vision as the old order. Seeking to mark his difference from the old order while proving his nationalist credentials, the salafi presidential candidate (later disqualified), Hazem Abu Ismail, called for greater development in Sinai to strengthen Egypt's eastern flank against Israel.<sup>136</sup> Bedouin activists responded by warning Islamists in the Nile Valley against underestimating Bedouin alienation and replicating their predecessors' mistakes.<sup>137</sup>

As the polarization intensified during the year following Mubarak's downfall, the economic costs of Sinai's instability spiralled. According to official figures released in January 2012, tourism revenues fell from \$12.5 billion in 2010 (equivalent to 11.5 per cent of GDP) to \$8.8 billion in 2011, while the number of tourists fell from 14.7 million to 9.8 million over the same period.<sup>138</sup> The decline was cushioned by an influx of refugees from Libya and Gaza. If these are excluded, industry sources estimate the decline at 45 per cent.<sup>139</sup> The fall was felt particularly harshly in South Sinai, where over a third of Egypt's hotels

128 Agriculture and Land Reclamation Ministry website, 28 February 2012. 'The revival of Al Salam Canal, supposed to develop Sinai', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 21 May 2012.

129 'As Saudi-Egypt bridge looks likely to get the green light, environmentalists see red', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 1 September 2012.

130 The Cairo-based college accepted 18 Bedouin recruits in September 2011. Interview with applicant, El Arish, August 2012.

131 First touted in August 2011, Prime Minister Kamal Ganzouri vowed to launch the Authority in February 2012. 'PM meets with Sinai Bedouin elders', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 13 February 2012. However, in September 2012, Morsy's government gave Egypt's intelligence agencies a veto over its decision-making powers and delayed its launch until 'early next year', despite a US grant of \$50 million. 'Egypt to allow foreign direct investment in Sinai Peninsula', *Al-Ahram*, 2 September 2012.

132 Interviews, Cairo and El Arish, March–April 2012.

133 'We warned the authorities for years that people in Sinai were trying to build an Islamic emirate but they weren't listening: Interview, Bakr Mohammed Sweilam, El-Gorah Community Development Association – North Sinai, El-Gorah, August 2012.

134 Interview, El Arish, July 2011.

135 'Citizens protest security void in North Sinai', *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 13 December 2011; 'Protests against security vacuum in Sharm el-Sheikh', *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 29 January 2012. In an attempt to show that their concerns were not forgotten, Egypt's Housing Ministry announced a plan to promote 'the populating' of Sinai by providing incentives to Nile Valley residents to relocate to the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, El Arish and Sharm al-Sheikh 'for national security purposes'. 'Housing Ministry plans to develop border areas against external threats', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 8 November 2011, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/512850> The government also continued to promote plans for exploitation of Sinai's natural resources, announcing commercial production of a new oil field near Abu Rudais, a coastal city in South Sinai, and gas exploration near Egypt's un-demarcated northern maritime border with Israel. 'Egypt announces new oil discovery in Sinai', *Al Masry al-Youm*, 5 November 2011. 'Defense Ministry approves tender for gas exploration in Mediterranean', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 27 May 2012.

136 Election rally attended by the author, Cairo University, 27 March 2012. Abu Ismail highlighted the potential for exploiting the peninsula's solar energy and raw minerals, particularly sand and oil, A spokesman said the Al-Nour party wanted to turn Sinai into Egypt's Dubai or Hong Kong, Interview, Yusri Hamad, Al-Nour party spokesman, Alexandria, 28 March 2012.

137 Interview, Mosaad Abu Fajr, Cairo, 30 March 2012.

138 'Tourism Flows Inbound in Egypt', *Euromonitor International*, March 2012. Tourism in Sharm el-Sheikh was down 85% from pre-uprising levels of 3.4 million in 2009. Nuqudy.com (a website reviewing markets in the Arab world), 28 March 2012.

139 'Egypt tourism: decline much larger than government reports', *Al-Ahram*, 16 January 2012.

are located.<sup>140</sup> Repeated attacks on the trans-Sinai gas pipeline dogged the resumption of even minimal exports to Israel and Jordan (the latter had relied on Egypt for 80 per cent of its electricity supplies), and threatened a long-term loss of custom. Trade from the QIZs fell sharply in September 2011 after Bedouin snipers temporarily interrupted the supply of inputs from Israel via Egypt's El-Ouja/Nitzana crossing with Israel, and forced it on occasion to close.<sup>141</sup> Israeli and other ships continue to pass through the Suez Canal, but strikes, rising silt levels and potential security threats have triggered fears for proceeds. In mid-March 2012, Egypt's semi-official media reported that the authorities had foiled an attack on foreign ships in the canal.<sup>142</sup>

The damage to Egypt's international relations was at least as serious as that to its economy. Use of anti-aircraft missiles during the August 2011 operation across Israel's border suggests that Bedouin have acquired the capability to target shipping through the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran. Egypt's military council further had to contend with the risk of interference by Jordan and Israel to safeguard their energy supplies and their borders against sabotage emanating from Sinai.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, in addition to targeting the last remnants of Israel's commercial relations with Egypt – the energy pipelines, QIZs traffic and tourism – the use of Sinai by armed groups as a launch-pad for attacks on Israel threatened to plunge Egypt into a new round of hostilities with its neighbour and further unsettle ties with its Western allies.

Continued volatility in Sinai undermined the authority of Egypt's military rulers across the country as a whole. The unfettered rise of Sinai's anti-state forces threatened to galvanize Islamists and other emerging opposition forces in Nile Valley cities, particularly Cairo, into challenging the SCAF through further mass protests or force of arms. Enduring attacks on foreign targets in Sinai (particularly the gas pipeline, which was widely seen as a symbol of the close, secret and corrupt ties between Israel and Mubarak and featured prominently in the prosecution against him) highlighted the SCAF's adherence to the policies of the Mubarak regime and divergence from Egyptian public opinion, which derided Egypt's continued relations with Israel. The cross-border attack on 18 August 2011 and Israel's violent response, in which six Egyptian soldiers were killed (see Chapter 4), precipitated the storming of Israel's embassy in Cairo in September 2011, raising a question mark over the two countries' 30-year ties. Forced to choose between its external patrons and the aspirations of the Egyptian people, the SCAF sought to obfuscate the issue (not least through its well-publicized hunt for Mossad spies), but it appeared increasingly to be pitted against the revolution that had propelled it to power.<sup>144</sup>

The continued freedom of movement enjoyed by Sinai's armed groups cast a pall over Egypt's stability under the SCAF, harming the country's bilateral economic and security relationships, and debilitating its international and domestic standing. By the eve of the presidential elections, more than thirty Egyptian soldiers had been killed in Sinai since the SCAF assumed power in February 2011.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, the resumption of the armed struggle by militants operating in Sinai justified the SCAF's restoration of emergency powers and the deployment of Egyptian forces along Israel's borders for the first time since the signing of the Camp David accords.

140 'Difficult times in Sinai', *Egypt Today*, 1 February 2012.

141 'Minister: Canceling industrial zone agreement would harm Egypt', MENA News Agency, 30 January 2012. Amos Harel, 'Peace in name only', *Haaretz*, 9 December 2011.

142 'Suez Canal attack foiled, says security source', *Al-Ahram*, 21 March 2012. In other signs of militant activity around the international shipping lane, Egyptian security officials uncovered anti-aircraft missiles near the canal. Presentation by MFO Commander Maj.-Gen. Warren Whiting to Tel Aviv University, 28 May 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZi1Bdex61k>. An intelligence officer was shot dead 500 metres from the water's edge near Qantara, and his car and weapons were stolen. 'Egyptian intelligence officer killed in Sinai', Maan News Agency, 24 November 2011. On 30 August 2012, Egypt reinforced its forces around the Suez Canal, after receiving reports of plans to attack soldiers in the area. 'Egypt "declares emergency after Suez militant threat"', Maan News Agency, 31 August 2012.

143 'Jordan: Egypt turned down offer to help secure gas pipeline Egypt', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 31 January 2012. Jordan offered military support to protect Egypt's energy lines.

144 Away from the public eye, security relations remained cordial. 'The relationship between Israeli and Egyptian liaison teams has become much closer since January. ... Some days the generals and the staff could be talking six or seven times a day. Superb!' Presentation by MFO Commander Maj.-Gen. Warren Whiting to Tel Aviv University, 28 May 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZi1Bdex61k>. For further examples of SCAF's uneasy balance, see Maha Azzam, *Egypt's Military Council and the Transition to Democracy*, Chatham House Briefing Paper, MENAP BP 2012/02, May 2012.

145 'Sinai buildup shifts tenet of Egypt-Israel peace', Associated Press, 9 August 2012.

By summer 2011, the SCAF had re-established the State Security Forces under a new name – National Security (*Amn al-Watani*) – and instructed the military, which had hitherto remained neutral, to intervene directly in Sinai's affairs. On 12 August 2011, the SCAF launched Operation Eagle, its largest military deployment in Sinai since 1967. The mission of the force, comprised of between 1,000 to 2,000 men from its Second Army, was to restore central control over Sinai and subdue armed Bedouin and Islamist groups.<sup>146</sup> Saleh al-Masri, the head of North Sinai's security directorate, declared a state of emergency, providing as elsewhere in Egypt for the army's deployment in town centres, but there were few reported instances of proactive military policing, such as arrests.<sup>147</sup>

At the same time, the SCAF sought to restore its leverage over Hamas, and ensure that, having left Syria, its leadership remained beholden to Cairo, not Qatar, the new seat of the movement's titular head Khaled Meshal. It again tightened control over the Gaza border, at times seemingly threatening to reimpose the siege. In early 2012, the Egyptian authorities restricted fuel supplies to Gaza, leading to severe shortages at petrol pumps and the temporary closure of Gaza's power plant. Egyptians, not Palestinians, had first rights to Egypt's subsidized fuel, explained officials, particularly given the country-wide disruption to fuel distribution. It was only after the Palestinian agreement that Qatar brokered between President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Meshal collapsed amid acrimony that Egypt agreed to resume supplies.<sup>148</sup> Even so, while the SCAF remained in control, Egyptian authorities maintained tight restrictions on the supply of fuel to the tunnels, citing existing supply problems in Egypt itself, and stipulated that full resumption would depend on the transfer of fuel through Israel's crossing at Kerem Shalom at full market rates. The SCAF's U-turn exacerbated outages of Gaza's power station for weeks on end, and it deprived Gaza of the heavily subsidized rate and Hamas of the tax revenues. At the same time Egypt signed a fresh deal with the Palestinian Authority, making it the Palestinian partner in any future developments of the energy linkage between Egypt and Gaza.<sup>149</sup> Hamas officials in Gaza also faced renewed restrictions on their entry to Egypt.<sup>150</sup> Security officials dismissed Hamas's offer to close the tunnels in exchange for opening the land border to trade, saying Hamas could not be trusted.<sup>151</sup>

In October 2011, Field Marshall Mohamed Tantawi, the head of the SCAF, claimed that the armed forces had ensured 'complete security on the Sinai Peninsula.'<sup>152</sup> But continued security breaches undermined the credibility of such claims. Unlike elsewhere in Egypt, the police did not return to Sinai's streets. For all the fanfare, the military surge again provoked Bedouin sensibilities, while troops proved too poorly trained and equipped to perform regular policing and calm the public's prevailing sense of insecurity. Observers said traffickers supplying the tunnels as well as militants passed through checkpoints unhindered, and at night many of the posts were unmanned.<sup>153</sup> Along the border with Israel, Egyptian forces engaged in daily armed skirmishes with smugglers, according to Israeli military officials.<sup>154</sup> The security forces were under pressure to show results, and in November 2011 they detained senior jihadi figures, including Mohammed Eid al-Tihi, whom they accused of masterminding the August 2011 cross-border attack and the pipeline sabotage from his hideout in an El Arish tourist chalet. Tihi's death in custody three months later precipitated another cycle of attacks in Sinai, including on tourists, the gas pipeline and al-Nakhl's police station, as well as the abduction of 17 border police on 9 February 2012. The violence acquired the proportions of an insurgency.

Egypt's own constitutional process accentuated the uncertainty. While the SCAF sought to preserve the relationship with Israel, it could not ignore the empowerment of the Muslim Brotherhood, which

146 Andrew McGregor, 'Has Al-Qaeda Opened a New Chapter in the Sinai Peninsula?', Jamestown Foundation, 17 August 2011.

147 'Security reinforcements dispatched to North and South Sinai', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 20 August 2011.

148 Egyptian officials felt slighted that the Doha agreement replaced an earlier deal brokered by Cairo in May 2011.

149 'PA, Egypt sign gas deal to end Gaza crisis', Maan News Agency, 27 March 2012.

150 In March 2012, Haniya's entry to Egypt was delayed for two hours, and a publicized meeting with his Egyptian counterpart Kamal Ganzouri failed to materialize. Mohammed, Najib, 'Egypt and Hamas: The Honeymoon that Wasn't', *The Media Line*, 22 March 2012.

151 'Do you think that the tunnels would stop if we opened the borders? Would they stop smuggling subsidized Egyptian fuel and profiting from the mark-up, or bringing in weapons? They are businessmen' Interview, security official, September 2012.

152 'Tantawi slams report that army will field a presidential candidate as "rumours"', MENA news agency, 5 October 2011.

153 Interviews, El Arish, August 2012.

154 Interview, Israeli commander, Eilat, February 2012.

in opposition had campaigned vigorously against it and continued to call for amendments to the Camp David accords.<sup>155</sup> In the wake of the Islamists' strong showing in the parliamentary elections, the SCAF appeared to take their aspirations into account, repeatedly seeking to lower tensions with Hamas in Gaza. It allowed Hamas leaders to move unimpeded through Egypt, to lead Friday prayers in its most reputable mosques, including Al-Azhar, to hold a Shura Council meeting in Cairo, and to open an office there under Hamas deputy leader Musa Abu Marzouq. In February 2012, Egypt's petroleum authority signed the country's first formal agreement with Gaza's rulers independently of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, committing itself to fulfilling Gaza's strategic goal of linkage to the Egyptian electricity grid.

However, Hamas's hope of a radical shift in Egyptian policy proved premature. Egypt's mainstream Islamist forces acted as only a partial brake on the SCAF's decision-making *vis-à-vis* Israel and Palestine. The fuel deal was overruled by Egyptian intelligence following objections by President Abbas, but was a strong indication of the Brotherhood's intent.<sup>156</sup> Ideologically committed to reorientating Sinai's economy (and more broadly Egypt's) away from Israel and towards the Arab world and Palestine in particular, they largely played down foreign policy issues once the prospect of assuming power appeared to near. In the wake of Israel's March 2012 assault on Gaza, which resulted in the largest death toll there since the 2008–09 Gaza war, the Muslim Brotherhood and the salafi bloc reacted with no more than symbolic measures, such as using their parliamentary majority on the foreign affairs committee to call for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and a review of diplomatic ties. Tellingly, they also made only muted protests against SCAF's severance of fuel supplies to Gaza, prompting one former Muslim Brotherhood stalwart to warn that Egypt's Islamist mainstream was selling out.<sup>157</sup> An important exception was Hazem Abu Ismail, who as a lawyer had petitioned the courts to restrict economic ties with Israel and in campaign rallies said Egypt's revolution would follow Iran's in shrugging off its subservience to US and Israeli hegemony.<sup>158</sup>

The dismissal of Egypt's senior military officers and the purge of Sinai's security leadership by Mohammed Morsy in the wake of the 5 August 2012 killing of 16 Egyptian soldiers at Rafah appeared to resolve, at least temporarily, the Brotherhood's struggle with the military. In Sinai, Morsy's new latitude enabled him to undertake to open a fresh page with 'the sons of Sinai', and, as elsewhere in Egypt, to prepare for a transition from the security apparatus to civil institutions. Morsy indicated his readiness to reverse state neglect with two high-profile visits to North Sinai, reportedly the first official presidential visits in three decades, and in a bid to encourage development, his government sanctioned foreign investment in the peninsula.<sup>159</sup> He backed the display of heavy weaponry, including two tank companies, in North Sinai as a show of force designed to fill the 30-year security vacuum. The forces did see some action – including the first instance of Egyptian attack-helicopters firing missiles in Sinai since the 1973 war<sup>160</sup> – but largely shied away from major confrontation, against the advice of some in the security establishment, which had vowed to avenge the killings.<sup>161</sup>

155 See for example 'Egypt: opposition slams gas sale to Israel', Inter Press Service News, 25 February 2008. The amendments focused on the security annexes to the Camp David accords, whose limitations on military deployment were seen as impairing Egyptian sovereignty. More broadly, the Brotherhood advocated 'moving from a Camp David paradigm, dominated by Israeli security fears, to one that met the aspirations of the people it professed to protect'. Interview, Khalid Hroub, Gaza City, July 2012.

156 'Haniya orders employees not to issue statements on fuel and power crisis', *Al Quds Al Arabi*, 22 March 2012.

157 Interview, Kamal el-Helbawi, former Muslim Brotherhood spokesman abroad, Cairo, 28 March 2012.

158 Campaign rally attended by author, Cairo University, 27 March 2012.

159 'Egypt to allow foreign direct investment in Sinai Peninsula', *Al Ahrām*, 2 September 2012. According to the report, the cabinet decision capped foreign investment at 45 per cent of any venture, and continued to bar foreign ownership of land.

160 Interview, local villager, al-Touma, August 2012. There were no casualties.

161 Initial reports of 20 killed in helicopter attacks on Sinai villages were wildly exaggerated. So too were reports of a campaign to destroy the tunnels: the four bulldozers deployed near the Rafah terminal barely scraped their surface. Author observation, Rafah, August 2012. Key militants who had initially fled into hiding after the launch of the campaign were soon seen shopping again in central Sheikh Zuwayed. Interview, local observer, Sheikh Zuwayed, August 2012. Egyptian officials said they had killed 11 militants and made 23 arrests. '23 terrorist suspects arrested: Defense Ministry', *Al Ahrām*, 30 August 2012. In contrast to Islamist leaders in North Sinai, security officials advocated a military campaign. 'The military forces are able to kill the terrorists quickly, within a few days. A military solution is sufficient!' Interview, Madhat Salah, retired general and mayor of El Arish, El Arish, August 2012.

In the wake of the purge, Morsy also began promoting a policy of engagement with Sinai's armed groups, coordinating closely with Muslim Brotherhood representatives in North Sinai who advocated a political over a military settlement.<sup>162</sup> Tellingly, Morsy appointed salafi parliamentarians from the Nile Valley to mediate the renunciation of the armed struggle in exchange for their entry into the political mainstream along the same lines as they had previously negotiated with President Anwar Sadat's assassins.<sup>163</sup> If coordinated in conjunction with local efforts<sup>164</sup> and a policy of social integration, this policy could indeed mark a break with the past. But some salafi Bedouin continued to bridle at what they view as uninvited external intervention, aimed at divide and rule.

The purge has regional ramifications as well. It afforded Hamas access not only to the Muslim Brotherhood-held Presidential Office but to the Egyptian defence and intelligence ministries, facilitating improved bilateral coordination. Even after security officials blamed Morsy's policy of *infatih* (openness) to the Hamas leaders in Gaza for the Rafah attack, he continued to call for a policy of open doors with Gaza, backing a relaxation of controls on Palestinian entry to Egypt, particularly at the Rafah terminal, and an end to the Gaza blockade on the entry of goods. Within two weeks of the 5 August Sinai attack, Egypt had again reopened to passenger traffic. Local Muslim Brotherhood members said formalization of trade ties would soon follow, obviating the need for the tunnel economy.<sup>165</sup> At least in the short term, Morsy shrugged off institutional resistance,<sup>166</sup> as well as criticism from liberals and supporters of the former regime that his Islamist government was providing electricity and fuel to Gaza at a time when Egypt faced increasing outages.<sup>167</sup>

For all the novelty of Egyptian politics, the country's Islamist leaders continued to display their pragmatism towards the United States and Israel. Following Israeli protests (see below), on 29 August 2012 Morsy withdrew the tanks he had deployed 22 days earlier in Area C without prior Israeli consent and appointed a new ambassador to Israel. In the wake of the attack, Egypt significantly upgraded its security coordination with Hamas, but only after securing a commitment from Hamas to prevent the use of Egyptian territory to perpetrate attacks against Israel.

That said, Hamas's sometimes awkward response to the 5 August 2012 attacks and its reluctance to hand over Hamas members wanted for questioning in Egypt did lead to a public cooling of relations. On 21 September 2012, Haniya and his 21-strong delegation returned from Egypt having met the Egyptian prime minister but not – as they had previously publicized they would – with the president. As the fighting in Sinai continued despite Morsy's reconciliation attempts, initial hopes of an early accord with the Bedouin dimmed. Morsy again sent back the tanks, this time without Israeli protest. With the government lurching from political to military initiatives, scepticism mounted over whether he could succeed at either.

162 Abdel Rahman al-Shobaji, a member of High Commission of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party elected in the 2012 parliamentary elections, accompanied Morsy on his August 2012 visit to El Arish and Rafah and was highly critical of the military operation. 'The Egyptian Army which hasn't fought a war in 30 years has rushed into an environment it doesn't understand. We risk ending up like the Soviets in Afghanistan. We need a political not a military solution.' Interview, al-Shobaji, El Arish, August 2012.

163 Morsy appointed Emad Abdel Ghaffour, the leader of the salafi party, Al-Nour, as his presidential adviser, and backed his mission to towns across North Sinai, including Rafah and El-Gorah. 'Only 5 per cent of *takfiris* are using violence. You can overcome them with *niqash* (debate). We have a long history of talking to them. We began in 1978 and persuaded thousands to reconsider.' Interview, Abdel Ghaffour, El Arish, August 2012. Under the provisional terms of the deal, armed groups and tribes would agree to the handover of weapons in return for a military withdrawal. The Barahma was the first tribe to comply. 'Sinai tribe hands its weapons to army', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 27 August 2012.

164 Local initiatives included that of Amar Salah Joda, a veterinarian from El Arish who was appointed minister for Sinai in the shadow government protestors formed in Tahrir Square. In August 2011 he said he had brokered a deal between armed salafi groups and security officials in El Arish, which was subsequently rejected by General Ahmad Gamal El-Din, then deputy interior minister for general security, whom Morsy appointed his interior minister. 'Thirty years ago those who killed Sadat were the extremists and rejectionists, and today they are part of the political process. Those who rejected society have formed political parties. We can do the same again. Instead of taking up arms, they can take up politics.' Interview, Joda, El Arish, August 2012.

165 'I support the closure of the tunnels as long as the gates are open. I won't accept the asphyxiation of Gaza.' Interview, Abdel Rahman al-Shobaji, Muslim Brotherhood parliamentarian, El Arish, August 2012.

166 For instance, following the 5 August attack, Egyptian security officials closed the border even to Palestinian pilgrims returning from the hajj.

167 'The annoying thing is that the [Egyptian] officials treat Gaza not just as Egypt's child, but as its favourite son.' Abdu Mubashir, *Al-Ahram*, 8 August 2012.

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## 4 Israeli Policy

For much of its early history, Israel treated Sinai as both its backyard and a buffer against any projection of Egyptian influence east, following Egypt's intervention in Palestine during the 1948 Arab–Israeli war. On five separate occasions over 25 years, Israel fought Egypt for the territory, losing more than 5,000 soldiers on the Egyptian front. It first invaded Sinai in the final weeks of the 1948 war, and then held the territory for several months in 1956 as part of a joint operation with Britain and France aimed at reversing Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal. In 1967 it launched an occupation of the entire peninsula that lasted 15 years and involved displacing thousands of Egyptians and establishing Jewish settlements in the northeast. An escalating three-year war of attrition resulted in hundreds of casualties and widespread shelling of Egyptian cities but no change in the frontline, and ended only with Anwar Sadat's succession as Egyptian president in 1970. Sadat resumed the war in 1973 after Israel rebuffed his land-for-peace proposal. Israel managed to repel the Egyptian offensive, but its initial retreat and very heavy losses in men, arms and prestige indicated that the price of retaining the peninsula had become too high. Under the 1979 Camp David accords, Israel withdrew from Sinai in exchange for a peace treaty, unfettered passage through the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran, and eastern Sinai's demilitarization along with the stationing of foreign armed monitors, the MFO, which has a current force size of 2,325. For almost 30 years the accord's terms held, with substantial advantages for Israel. This enabled sharp reductions in Israeli forces along the Sinai border and their redeployment in other theatres. For over a generation after 1973, Israel fought its external wars across its northern front. So secure did Israel consider its Egyptian frontier that in 2007 it removed its border guard.

But over time, the absence of armed forces in Sinai created a power vacuum that local, regional and transnational forces found opportunities to fill. Israel's pullout from Gaza exacerbated nervousness at its loss of control. At various junctures, Israel has weighed filling the vacuum it left behind, either by redeploying its own forces, for instance along the Philadelphi corridor it created between Gaza and Sinai, or by turning to others, such as through deployment of an international force in Gaza. In 2009, Israel called on the international community to constrain the rise of the new forces and their supply lines led by Hamas, only ending its Gaza offensive after securing US agreement to assist in severing the Sinai-to-Gaza smuggling.<sup>168</sup> But such efforts proved futile in the face of Israel's own border closure with Gaza; this forced Gazans to shift trade routes south and created a symbiotic relationship between Gaza's rulers and Sinai's Bedouin, undermining the leverage Israel had historically exercised over both.<sup>169</sup> In September 2011, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu warned that Sinai constituted a security threat to Israel.<sup>170</sup>

The dilemma for Israel's strategists is whether its southern frontier is best protected by leaving Sinai in the hands of hostile but less technologically advanced non-state actors, empowering Egypt's military presence, or by more proactive intervention while Egypt is weak. The latter remains a last resort, laden with risks at a time when Israel feels increasingly isolated. As a flagrant violation of the Camp David accords, a new occupation would lead to the immediate loss of Israel's prime regional ally, and very likely Jordan too, leaving it without diplomatic relations in the Arab world. However, Israel fears

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168 On 16 January 2009, the United States and Israel signed an agreement committing the former to help stem weapons flows to Gaza. On 4 February 2009, Denmark hosted an international conference committing Western support for the deal.

169 While Bedouin in North Sinai remember Israeli rule for dislocation and population movement around the settlement enclave of Yamit, South Sinai Bedouin remember Israeli rule more fondly for connecting their villages to the water supply and opening medical centres. Interviews, tribal leader, El Arish, July 2011, and foreign observer, September 2011. In the 2004–06 bombing campaigns, Israelis detected signs of residual affinities with the Bedouin, which they claim avoided Israeli targets. Interview, foreign observer, September 2011.

170 Interview, *Jerusalem Post*, 29 September 2011.

that the hands-off option would enable Hamas to extend its reach southwards.<sup>171</sup> Not all Israelis view this unfavourably. Some argue that if Israel cut ties with Gaza, its growing population would shift its aspirations for living space from Palestine to northern Sinai, and resolve its problems of overcrowding at Sinai's expense. But an emboldened Hamas on Israel's southern flank risks inflaming a border that has been enjoying 30 years of quiet, sparking another war of attrition that could turn Sinai into a proxy battlefield, and in the event of an Israeli military response precipitate a rupture of relations with Egypt.<sup>172</sup> Despite the fact that, in the uncertainty of the post-Mubarak era, relations with Egypt seem to be at their most precarious since Camp David, sanctioning Egypt's remilitarization of Sinai appeared Israel's 'least worst' alternative.

Days before Mubarak's fall, Israel sanctioned Egypt's deployment of two armed battalions in northeastern Sinai, marking the second agreed alteration to the security annex of the Camp David accords.<sup>173</sup> Two weeks later, following sabotage of the Sinai gas pipeline, Israel approved a second deployment, bringing the total to 3,750 men, or six battalions.<sup>174</sup> The deployments, renewed by monthly agreement, allow for Egypt to station soldiers at its 300 border posts, hitherto manned only by civilian police.

Israeli decision-makers remained committed to the policy, despite a series of serious security breaches which highlighted its limitations.<sup>175</sup> On 18 August 2011, a unit of up to 20 militants crossed Israel's Sinai border 20 kilometres north of Taba, occupied the highway, opened fire on a bus, fired several anti-tank missiles at cars, and killed eight Israelis, five of them civilians. Military analysts described the operation as the most sophisticated since Hezbollah's abduction of Israeli soldiers in 2006 and predicted more would follow. Its diplomatic repercussions were more severe. Outraged by the killing of six Egyptian soldiers in the counter-attack,<sup>176</sup> protestors in Cairo stormed the Israeli embassy, forcing its closure and threatening the rupture of the two countries' 33-year-old treaty. At the time of writing, there was still no permanent Israeli embassy in Cairo, although Morsy's government appointed a new ambassador to Israel on 2 September 2012.<sup>177</sup>

Bilaterally, Israel authorized Egypt to launch its largest military operation in Sinai since the 1973 war against the militants. In parallel, Israel has sought to bolster the bilateral strategic relationship. It apologized for the killing of six Egyptian soldiers in its counter-attack after the cross-border raid (something it had refused to do when it killed 10 Turkish civilians aboard the Gaza-bound flotilla in 2010). It also controversially attributed the attack to Palestinian militants and conducted reprisals in Gaza, not Sinai – even after the identities of the perpetrators were all revealed to be Bedouin.<sup>178</sup> Further projecting the SCAF's influence internationally, Israel has also highlighted Egypt's role in negotiating a prisoner exchange with Hamas after five years of fruitless talks.<sup>179</sup>

At the same time, Israel has adopted a defensive posture in the face of Egypt's popular upheaval, which it sees as hostile, and has fortified the south of the country. It has accelerated construction of a \$400-million separation barrier, adapting a barricade initially intended to deter migrants and smugglers

171 Interview, Israeli commander, February 2012.

172 Interview, Yossi Alpher, former Israeli intelligence officer and director of Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, August 2011. Some have likened the situation to Fatah's operations in Jordan before 1970 or Hezbollah's in Lebanon more recently. In both cases, Israel counter-attacked.

173 'Israel agrees to some Egyptian troops in Sinai', Associated Press, 31 January 2011. In 2005 Israel agreed to allow Egypt to station 750 border guards along its border with Gaza following its disengagement from Gaza.

174 'Israel approves more Egyptian troops in Sinai', Reuters, 16 February 2011. The Israeli government initially refused Egypt's requests for a second tranche before an Israeli investor in Egypt intervened by asking Netanyahu 'whether 3,000 or even 5,000 Egyptian soldiers with light arms would really constitute a threat to Israel'. Interview, Israeli businessman, July 2011. See also 'Israel says no to more Egyptian forces', *Jerusalem Post*, 7 February 2011.

175 Defence Minister Ehud Barak said the attack 'reflects the weakening of Egypt's hold in the Sinai and the broadening of activities by terror elements', 'Egypt lodges formal complaint over Israel killing three Egyptian security forces', *Haaretz*, 19 August 2011.

176 Despite Israeli denials, international peacekeepers were reported as saying Israeli soldiers crossed into Sinai in pursuit of the perpetrators, where they clashed with Egyptian border police. 'UN peacekeeping force: Israeli forces crossed Egyptian border by land', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 20 August 2011.

177 The Israeli ambassador works one to two days per week from his private residence. Meeting with Ronnie Bar On, chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, 13 September 2012.

178 'Mistake in the sky', *Yediot Ahronoth*, 21 September 2011, 'Doubts emerge over identity of terrorists who carried out attack in Israel's south', *Haaretz*, 25 August 2011. Ehud Yaari, *Sinai: A New Front*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, No. 9, January 2012. Some argue that the claims of Gazan involvement were politically motivated. Interview, Western security expert, August 2011.

179 On 18 October 2011, Israel released 477 Palestinian prisoners mostly affiliated with Hamas in exchange for an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, captured in June 2006. It released a further 550 prisoners in December 2011.



for military defence. Under construction at a rate of 800 metres per day, and scheduled for completion by the end of 2012, this 5.5-metre-high and 1.5-metre-deep metal barricade is set to run the length of its 240-kilometre border with Egypt. Its architects say it is equipped with trenches, partial radar surveillance, and 30-metre-high watch-towers.<sup>180</sup> Israel also closed its border highway to civilian traffic, and deployed one of its four Iron Dome anti-missile batteries around Eilat<sup>181</sup> – a development precipitated by a missile strike on Eilat on the eve of the 2012 Passover holiday, the first such attack since Mubarak's fall.<sup>182</sup> Israel's national air carrier has also equipped its planes landing in Eilat with anti-missile defences based on laser technology.<sup>183</sup> Its 80th (Edom) Division, with responsibility for the border with Egypt, has doubled its combat strength along the border, increasing troop deployment from four to eight battalions concentrated facing Rafah in the north, al-Nakhl in the centre, and the Straits of Tiran in the south. A new brigade has been created to defend Eilat<sup>184</sup> and a unit operates unmanned surveillance aircraft along the border. Israel has also authorized the formation of armed emergency squads in settlements along the border, and taken steps to reverse the depletion of its border intelligence network.<sup>185</sup> While exercising caution in Sinai, it has acted forcefully in Gaza, initiating repeated strikes it says are pre-emptive against armed groups it claims are planning attacks via Sinai.<sup>186</sup>

The revamped security measures have brought Israel partial relief. As the wall lengthens, the traffic of migrants in the third quarter of 2012 has fallen sharply.<sup>187</sup> (A contributory factor is the changes to Israel's rules of engagement, including allegations that Israeli forces have opened fire when migrants approach the Egyptian side of the border, forcing them back into Egypt.<sup>188</sup>)

But Israeli army officers are not sanguine about the long-term efficacy of their country's defensive measures and reliance on its ties with Egypt. Israel lacks the anti-missile batteries to cover the length of the 240-kilometre border at a time when its Egyptian border appears potentially as vulnerable to missile attacks as its border with Gaza.<sup>189</sup> Its wall, too, is unlikely to withstand serious challenge. An Israeli commander in Eilat compared it unfavourably with the wall Israel constructed along Gaza's southern border before its pull-out, which Hamas succeeded in demolishing within a few hours in January 2008. 'It's only an obstacle. They [Sinai's armed groups] will find a way to infiltrate underneath with tunnels or by digging holes,' he said.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, by harming Bedouin smugglers as well as militants, the wall will jeopardize economic ties that gave Israel leverage long after its formal withdrawal in the early 1980s, and will compound Bedouin dependency on Gaza. In short, the risks of future violence could be exacerbated by a security approach that treats the results, but not the causes, of Bedouin militancy.

At the same time, confidence in the Egyptian leadership's ability or willingness to wage a Sinai-based 'war on terror' is waning. Egypt's troop deployment in North Sinai's towns has failed to calm Sinai's volatile interior. The SCAF appeared too preoccupied with events in Cairo and the Nile Valley, and shrank from a direct confrontation with militants whose outcome seemed far from assured. Israeli commentators expressed disappointment that Egypt had deployed only half the force sanctioned in

180 'A fence, but not a solution on the Israel-Egypt border', *Haaretz*, 25 November 2011. By September 2012, 150 kilometres had been completed. Interview, Israeli military official, September 2012.

181 Interview, international security expert, Gaza, July 2012. See 'Iron dome en route to Eilat', *Yediot Ahronoth*, 20 August 2012.

182 'Sinai is becoming a terrorist launching pad, Netanyahu says', *Israel Hayom*, 5 April 2012.

183 'Israel rushes airliner defences as Libya leaks SAMs', Reuters, 11 November 2012.

184 'Hamas sets up rocket production line in Sinai', *Jerusalem Post*, 11 December 2011.

185 As a result of two decades of calm and the transfer of resources, manpower and intelligence-gathering away from south, 'the quality of intel we get from Sinai is low'. Interview, Israeli army commander, February 2012. Within months this had changed. Bedouin tribesmen in Sinai say Israel has reactivated its networks there; Bedouin soldiers whose clan members in Sinai could further facilitate contacts may also play a role. Interview, Anshel Pfeffer, Israeli journalist, 5 October 2011. The arrival of a Hamas security official, Taher Atwa, in an Israeli jail days after his abduction in El Arish, suggests Israeli activity had escalated from intelligence-gathering to operations.

186 On 9 March 2012, Israel killed Zuhir Al-Qaisi, head of the Popular Resistance Committee, on the grounds he was planning an attack from Sinai. The killing sparked the largest upsurge in Israel-Gaza fighting since the 2008-09 Gaza war.

187 The number of migrants crossing via Sinai fell from 2,295 in January 2012 to 196 in August 2012. Interview, UN observer, Jerusalem, September 2012. Egypt reported that it apprehended more than 500 migrants in July, a sharp uptick of several hundred from the monthly average. 'Israel making inroads in halting African migration', Associated Press, 24 August 2012.

188 Testimonies from wounded migrants, provided to the author, July 2012.

189 Reported missile attacks included strikes on Eilat in April 2012 and Mitzpe Ramon and Ovda in June 2012.

190 Interview, Israeli commander, Eilat, 15 February 2012.

eastern Sinai.<sup>191</sup> 'Israel is frustrated,' noted an Israeli regional analyst. 'It has allowed the army back into Sinai but they are not doing anything. Officials increasingly view Egypt, not the Bedouin, as the problem.'<sup>192</sup> In February 2012, an Israeli military officer patrolling the border claimed that Egypt's forces had abandoned most of their 300 watch-towers along the Israeli border, and that they had outsourced dozens of lookout posts to former prison inmates who maintained relationships with local Bedouin and salafi groups.<sup>193</sup>

Compounding their concern, Israeli military commanders feared that operations would push Hamas to side more openly with the jihadi groups, and Egypt and Turkey not only to further downgrade ties with Israel but to intervene on Gaza's behalf.<sup>194</sup> The risks of spillover seemed to mount after Israel retaliated against Gaza for cross-border attacks emanating from Sinai, prompting some of the most prolonged fighting between Gaza and Israel since the Gaza War.<sup>195</sup> Many Israeli government officials continued to warn that an escalation on its southern border could damage relations to breaking point, and it has stopped short of a full-scale assault that might drag others in.

Finally, the policy of restraint and reliance on Egypt failed to prevent the slide in bilateral relations, the security sector aside, to their lowest point since the Camp David accords. Despite Egypt's military deployment, militants sabotaged the Sinai gas pipeline 14 times in a year, leading to the suspension of the gas contract and supplies that accounted for 43 per cent of Israel's gas consumption.<sup>196</sup> Ongoing travel alerts repeatedly led to closure of Israel's last foreign holiday destination accessible by land. Traffic involving the QIZs, as noted, was subject to periodic closure. Political contacts reportedly deteriorated to the point where Egypt's leadership declined to take Netanyahu's calls during the storming of the Israeli embassy in Cairo.<sup>197</sup> As a sign that Israel believes that the downturn could be long-term, it has eyed the financial possibilities arising from Egypt's adversity, and has begun work on creating transport links through Israel that would enable traders to bypass the Suez Canal. It has begun pumping Central Asian oil arriving from Turkey at Ashkelon through its pipeline to the Red Sea, and signed a contract with China to construct a 350-kilometre rail link for international freight between Tel Aviv and Eilat.<sup>198</sup> By developing alternatives both to Egypt's gas fields and to the global transit through Suez, Israel's government threatens not only to drain the Camp David accords of the last remaining tangible manifestation of Israeli–Egyptian normalization, but to replace once courteous relations with rivalry.

Could relations again turn hostile? After months of tight-lipped, off-record briefings, Israeli officials began publicly suggesting that if Egypt should fail to secure Sinai, Israel would not stand idly by.<sup>199</sup> Commentators articulated their concerns about how Egypt might respond in the event of an Israeli incursion in Sinai or offensive in Gaza. Whereas the Egyptian front had remained quiet through all Israel's wars since the signing of the Camp David accords, they warned that in future confrontations Israel might have to fight on multiple fronts, as in 1973. Diplomatic relations survived the interregnum when Israel's historical allies, Egypt's

191 See, for example, Alex Fishman, 'Our hands are tied', *Yediot Ahronoth*, 6 April 2012.

192 Interview, Israeli Arab affairs analyst, Jerusalem, December 2011. Hawks in Netanyahu's party, Likud, had long aired their opposition to the return of Egyptian forces to the Israeli border. See Yuval Steinitz, then Chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee and current finance minister, quoted in 'Steinitz slams Philadelphi deal', *The Jerusalem Post*, 25 August 2005.

193 Interview, Israeli officer, Eilat, 15 February 2012.

194 Interview, adviser to senior Israeli politician, October 2011.

195 In March 2012, a cross-border skirmish starting from Sinai led to clashes between Gaza and Israel which resulted in one Israeli and 16 Palestinian fatalities; a further attack from Sinai in June 2012 led to Hamas's direct intervention and the launch of over 130 missiles. Although Israel denied a connection, analysts noted that the 5 August 2012 attack on Egyptian forces and the Israeli border occurred a few hours after Israel killed a 22-year-old salafi militant in Gaza, whom Israeli security forces said was involved in the Mujahedeen Shura Council of Jerusalem's June 2012 attack across the Sinai border and had been planning a further attack in the peninsula. 'IDF thwarts complex terror infiltration from Sinai', *Jerusalem Post*, 6 August 2012. Israel had earlier publicly warned that an attack in Sinai was imminent. 'Egypt president promises security for tourists', AFP, 4 August 2012.

196 'Egypt unilaterally cancels gas deal with Israel', *Al Ahram*, 22 April 2012. Signed in 2005, the contract had a 20-year-term. The loss of Egyptian gas cost Israel's economy some \$80 million per month, or nearly \$1 billion in the year following Egypt's uprising. Intervention by private security working for Israel's East Mediterranean Gas Company also failed to prevent the attacks.

197 Interview, Israeli official, Jerusalem, September 2012.

198 Cabinet communiqué, 5 February 2012. 'This kind of railway would link the Indian-Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Ocean. It could replace the Suez Canal. Who knows what will transpire in Egypt in the coming years', Israeli finance minister Yuval Steinitz, quoted in 'Israeli Finance Minister promises to double exports to China', *Yediot Ahronoth*, 1 March 2012.

199 Foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman warned that the situation in Egypt was more worrying than Iran. 'Egypt's Sinai turning into "Wild West"', Reuters, 24 April 2012.

military commanders, held sway.<sup>200</sup> But the rise of Egypt's new Islamist rulers, committed to amending the peace treaty and eschewing contacts with Israel, filled Israeli leaders with foreboding.<sup>201</sup> While some advised caution,<sup>202</sup> others argued that Islamist rule of Egypt would render the presence of Egyptian forces near Israel's borders more threatening than the prevailing mayhem in Sinai. In the wake of President Morsy's electoral victory some Israelis stated that all scenarios were on the table, including an end to security coordination and the collapse of the Camp David treaty.<sup>203</sup>

The 5 August 2012 attack and newly elected President Morsy's unexpected decision to purge the military commanders who had managed the interregnum posed the most serious test yet for Israel's policy. The results were surprising. Far from providing cover for Islamist operations, Egypt's new Islamist leadership launched its most strident campaign to date against militants. After initially expressing hopes that the attack would awaken Egypt from its torpor,<sup>204</sup> Israeli officials switched tack in the face of a forceful Egyptian response, expressing concern at the uncoordinated build-up of Egyptian military power in a designated demilitarized zone and demanding that Egypt withdraw its tanks, which they said was done without prior coordination with the Israeli army (as required by the peace treaty).<sup>205</sup> At the same time, Egyptian reinforcements, they noted, had done little to shore up security along their common border. On 21 September, militants conducted their fourth cross-border raid in three months, killing an Israeli soldier.<sup>206</sup> Israel took steps to boost its own capabilities, reportedly conducting covert military operations in Sinai.<sup>207</sup> As instability there worsened, Israel as well as Egypt embarked on an arms build-up.<sup>208</sup>

That said, the dramatic shift in Egypt's power struggle was not without some good effect. Bereft of the cover of the SCAF to maintain relations with Israel, Morsy's government had scant choice but to communicate directly with Israel. Within days, his defence minister spoke directly with his Israeli counterpart, giving Israel access to Morsy's government for the first time. The government's decision to withdraw its tanks from Zones C and B, after Israeli protests of violations to the military annex of the Camp David accords, was at least some indication of appreciation of Israel's concerns. The jihadi attacks targeting Egypt as well as Israel further facilitated dialogue. Had jihadi groups solely targeted Israel's border, the Morsy government might have displayed greater ambivalence. As the situation unfolded, however, it gave the two countries a common – if tacit – enemy. Where previously Israeli security commentators had warned that a Morsy government would turn Israel's border with Egypt into 'a border of confrontation', there is growing awareness of a common interest, as evidenced in recent op-eds.<sup>209</sup>

200 Despite the risk of adverse political fallout, Egypt publicized its seizure of weapons in Sinai in late 2011. 'Egypt seizes Gaza-bound anti-aircraft missiles', *Jerusalem Post*, 2 November 2011. Israeli businessmen also expressed confidence that given Egypt's fiscal crisis, economic considerations would prevail. In April 2012, Israel and Egypt signed their first bilateral agreement since Mubarak's fall, providing for the expansion of the QIZs to Upper Egypt during the visit. 'Egypt to expand Qualified Industrial Zones, Trade Minister says', *Bloomberg*, 25 March 2011. Significantly Egypt's industry minister secured the Brotherhood's buy-in to maintain the 1994 agreement after warning that Egypt earned \$1.3 billion from the QIZs arrangements 'Minister: canceling industrial zone agreement would harm Egypt', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 31 January 2012.

201 At the height of the power struggle between SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood, Israel's leadership openly declared its support for the former, praising the SCAF's constitutional declaration in June that upheld the military's oversight over foreign policy and defence, and its hold on the prerogative to wage war. 'We share common interests with Egypt's defence establishment, and many Sunni governments around us ... The revolution in Egypt has been hijacked by the Muslim Brotherhood', Deputy Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Yaalon, addressing a conference attended by the author, Jerusalem, 12 July 2012.

202 They argue that the Muslim Brotherhood's preoccupation with domestic affairs and fear of jeopardizing Western financial support would prevent an Egyptian initiation of hostilities. 'The opposite of peace is not war', Amos Yadlin, Israel's former military intelligence chief told the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* in January 2012, noting that Israel and Syria have no peace agreement but nevertheless have a quiet border. 'Amos Yadlin: Iran has all the components for a nuclear bomb', *Maariv*, 20 January 2012. Israeli officials hopeful of maintaining the alliance further took succour from apparent tensions between the new Egyptian regime and Hamas, emphasizing that Brotherhood was 'above all, an Egyptian movement'.

203 Alex Fishman, 'Our hands are tied', *Yediot Ahronoth*, 6 April 2012.

204 'We hope this will be a fitting wakeup call for the Egyptians to take things in hand on their side more forcefully', Defence Minister Ehud Barak, quoted in 'Egypt prepares Sinai sweep after deadly attack', *Associated Press*, 6 August 2012.

205 'Sharp message from Netanyahu to Cairo: remove the tanks from Sinai', *Maariv*, 22 August 2012.

206 Three militants were subsequently killed by Israeli forces. Interview, Israeli military spokesman, 21 September 2012.

207 Three weeks after the 5 August attack, militant groups in Sinai claimed that the killing of an operative, Ibrahim Awedah, a salafi from Tayaha tribe in Hassana town, on a motorbike was attributable to Israeli action. Egyptian security officials reportedly corroborated the allegation. 'Egyptian security: Mossad agents entered Sinai', *Maan News Agency*, 2 September 2012. Local observers said the killing marked the first direct Israeli operation in Sinai since 1982.

208 Following the June attack, Israel deployed two tanks to the border, to the Camp David accords' security annex. Yoav Limor, War border, *Israel Hayom*, 19 June 2012.

209 Alex Fishman, 'A different country', *Yediot Ahronoth*, 19 June 2012.

Discussion of reoccupation, however temporary or partial, continues to surface in Israel's media. Though military officials refrain from on-record discussion, Israeli security analysts speaking on Israel's airwaves have posited limited offensives in Sinai, as well as reoccupation of the Gaza–Sinai border.<sup>210</sup> This has led to Egypt publicly registering its concern.<sup>211</sup> Some claim that Egypt is already violating the Camp David accords by tolerating arms supplies to a hostile entity on Israel's border.<sup>212</sup> Others argue that militants armed with anti-tank missiles could target shipping through the Straits of Tiran, the closure of which served as an Israeli *casus belli* in 1956 and 1967. A minority view holds that continued attacks from Sinai could yet push Israel to switch from a defensive to an offensive or pre-emptive posture there, as in Gaza. Tellingly, after a missile apparently launched from Sinai struck Eilat in April 2012, Netanyahu warned as much.<sup>213</sup> It is hard to imagine how sustained Israeli operations in Sinai, covert or otherwise, could occur without further, perhaps fatal, damage to its peace treaty with Egypt, or without precipitating a regional conflict. The first tentative contacts between the Morsy and Netanyahu governments notwithstanding, the prevailing uncertainty continues to give rise to concern that Sinai could yet degenerate into a proxy theatre of war.

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210 'Managing the situation requires a larger military presence in the area facing Sinai. Under duress, Israel might even be forced to recapture parts of Sinai.' Efraim Inbar, director of Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 'The 2011 Arab Uprisings and Israel's National Security', *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* No. 95, Bar Ilan University, February 2012. By contrast, Jordan, he said, still affords 'strategic depth, or a buffer zone between it [Israel] and potential enemy lines to the east'.

211 Interview with Yasser Othman, Egyptian representative to the Palestinian Authority, Maan News Agency, 30 September 2011.

212 'The Egyptian military has held back from dismantling the Hamas infrastructure in the peninsula', *Jerusalem Post*, 2 November 2011.

213 'Sinai is becoming a terrorist launching pad, Netanyahu says', *Israel Hayom*, 5 April 2012. See also the comments by former Israeli National Security Council head Uzi Dayan quoted in 'Israel should consider Sinai intervention force', *Jerusalem Post*, 24 November 2011.

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## 5 Conclusion

The treaties and mechanisms checking tensions in and around the Sinai peninsula have rarely appeared more fragile and frail. The forces in and around the territory are rearming, fortifying and viewing their neighbours with mounting suspicion. The prospect of a major upsurge in violence is weighed and prepared for by all.

Even as the ground shifts from under them, some in Egypt and Israel have sought to retreat into old practices and re-establish the security regimes that kept Sinai under control before the growth of a sizeable local population and the arrival of transnational movements. Israeli and Egyptian security officials continue to contemplate quarantining Gaza, and revise military options to dislodge the militant presence in Sinai. But relying on the security order to reassert itself over the region's emboldened and ascendant new actors is a strategy that is far from guaranteeing success. Despite much-publicized crackdowns, attacks on Egyptian economic and security holdings in Sinai as well as Israel's border have only increased. The surge in sabre-rattling has corroded Israel's first peace treaty with an Arab state to the extent that one observer terms it a partial truce.<sup>214</sup> Far from suppressing its intended targets, military force may well be accelerating an arms race and heightening the risks of a confrontation that could spill beyond Sinai and Gaza, jeopardizing the broader region and international shipping. Outside forces could be dragged into yet another Arab front, precipitating another showdown with jihadi forces. Such an outcome is in no one's interest.

An alternative is for all parties with interests in Sinai to examine the roots as well as the symptoms of conflict there, and to develop political as well as military tools to deal with them. Sinai is no longer a no man's land. Large areas have seen rapid population growth, for which state provision and integration lag far behind. Deprivation, discrimination and dependence on the informal economy all play a part in fomenting instability, as regional security officials have readily admitted. 'The future of relations between Israel and Egypt is with the Bedouin, and that is dangerous,' says a prominent Israeli Arab affairs analyst.<sup>215</sup>

To this end, Egypt should consider negotiating a new compact with its Bedouin population, providing for a more equitable distribution of power and resources. Implementing government promises would be a welcome first step. With Egypt's economy faltering, large-scale economic development is beyond the country's current means, but the authorities can facilitate the rapid integration of Bedouin into the security services and state bureaucracy, provincial councils and the private sector. Social reforms, including the provision of running water to Sinai villages and legislation to enable Bedouin registration of land, are a priority and a tangible barometer of government intentions. Similarly, measures to include Bedouin in post-Mubarak decision-making and in drawing up the new constitution would give a fillip to public confidence in the government's readiness to transfer decision-making from acting and retired generals to civilians. An apology and compensation for past repressive security force violations, particularly deaths in detention, would win widespread local applause. Short of such a compact, popular support for the Morsy regime in Sinai will be likely to wane rapidly. Sinai's Bedouin will again solicit external support, pin their colours ever more firmly to a global jihadi mast and impose ever higher costs on Egypt's hold.

If the security forces are to withdraw from the civilian areas of control that they have monopolized for 30 years, they must be equipped to fulfil the function for which they are intended: border protection. The need for a monitoring force will remain, as on the Syrian–Israeli border, but all parties should acknowledge that the security vacuum created by the Camp David accords has been instrumental in providing space for the smuggling rings, tribal networks and militant groups to operate. Old agreements need to adapt to existing circumstances if they are to continue to hold.

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214 Amos Harel, 'Peace in name only', *Haaretz*, 9 December 2011.

215 Ehud Yaari, addressing a conference attended by the author, Jerusalem, 12 July 2012.

Moreover, the international monitoring force established over 30 years ago was not set up for dealing with the presence of non-state actors, nor does it appear competent to deal with them. It lacks the mechanisms to communicate with all the parties, to monitor their operations effectively and to mediate between them. An amended agreement providing not just for greater troop deployment but also for greater coordination and communication between the state and quasi-state actors, either directly or through a third party, could do much to foster stability.

All parties – Egypt, Israel, Gaza and Sinai – should strive to formalize their economic relations, and end the curbs and policies of exclusion which foster the informal economies that bolster and fund non-state actors. Security for all, Israel included, can better be achieved by monitoring access and movement of people and goods across Gaza's border with Egypt above ground, rather than hidden below it. Such an approach would also reassert Egyptian state authority over a border that threatens to slip out of government control.<sup>216</sup> Formal commerce, too, could deliver broader financial returns, even for the Egyptian officials who argue that opening the borders would serve Israel's agenda of dislocating Gaza from the rest of Palestine, while pocketing the proceeds of smugglers' bribes. Egypt's North Sinai governor has suggested formalizing the informal economy and turning Rafah into a free-trade zone. As such it would earn an estimated \$1.7 billion in trade, a significant sum for Egypt's cash-strapped and aid-dependent formal economy. Adding Gaza to the trans-Sinai pipeline supplying Egypt's gas to the region would give Gaza's *de facto* rulers an incentive to prevent the network's sabotage, benefiting all. All told, stability in Sinai and Gaza remain intimately linked.

Finally, the region could also benefit from a reality check. Israel, the Mubarak regime and key players in the international community spent the past decade fighting Islamist movements, only to see them amass power to the point where they are now state or quasi-state actors with regional reach. A new regulatory framework that incorporates Gaza into the regional security framework, either through a Palestinian reconciliation government or, failing that, directly, would do much to lower tensions in the region.<sup>217</sup> The breach of Israel's defences at the intersection of its borders with Egypt and Gaza on 5 August 2012 has already precipitated some fresh thinking on the part of all three actors. Hamas has given its assurance that it will not allow Egypt to be used as a back door for Palestinian militants to attack Israel, thereby extending its non-aggression ceasefire along its border with Israel to Sinai as well; Egypt's Islamist government has heightened its security coordination with Hamas forces in Gaza, while maintaining its coordination with Israel; and some Israeli officials say that given the risk of imploding central authorities on Israel's borders, stabilization of the regimes in both Egypt and Gaza is to be welcomed.<sup>218</sup> While Israel and Hamas have long looked to Egypt to mediate truces when confrontation ensues, security analysts in Israel have proposed a more formal relationship whereby existing security arrangements covering Sinai could include Gaza.<sup>219</sup> Similarly, in Gaza a political analyst posited that the enclave's Hamas rulers should be invited to join the security structures of the Camp David accords.

Veteran American officials in the region still look askance at including the Palestinian Islamist movement with a history of terrorism in any regional security framework. But the alternative could be worse. Tensions stemming from Gaza's isolation have repeatedly spilled into Sinai, to the point where a resumption of hostilities between Egypt and Israel is no longer unthinkable.

216 'As long as you have tunnels, you have no control over your borders. We need to open a crossing by agreement between the Egyptian and Gaza governments for people and goods.' Interview, Bakr Mohammed Sweilam, El-Gorah Community Development Association – North Sinai, El-Gorah, August 2012.

217 Faced with the growing prospect of formal Egyptian–Gaza trade ties even without a reconciliation agreement, Palestinian Authority officials have proposed stationing their customs officials on the Egyptian side of the border as a means of preventing Hamas from accruing the customs revenues. Alternatively they have proposed withholding the financial support they currently provide to Gaza, which they say comprises about half of their cash-strapped budget. Interviews, PA officials, Ramallah, August 2012.

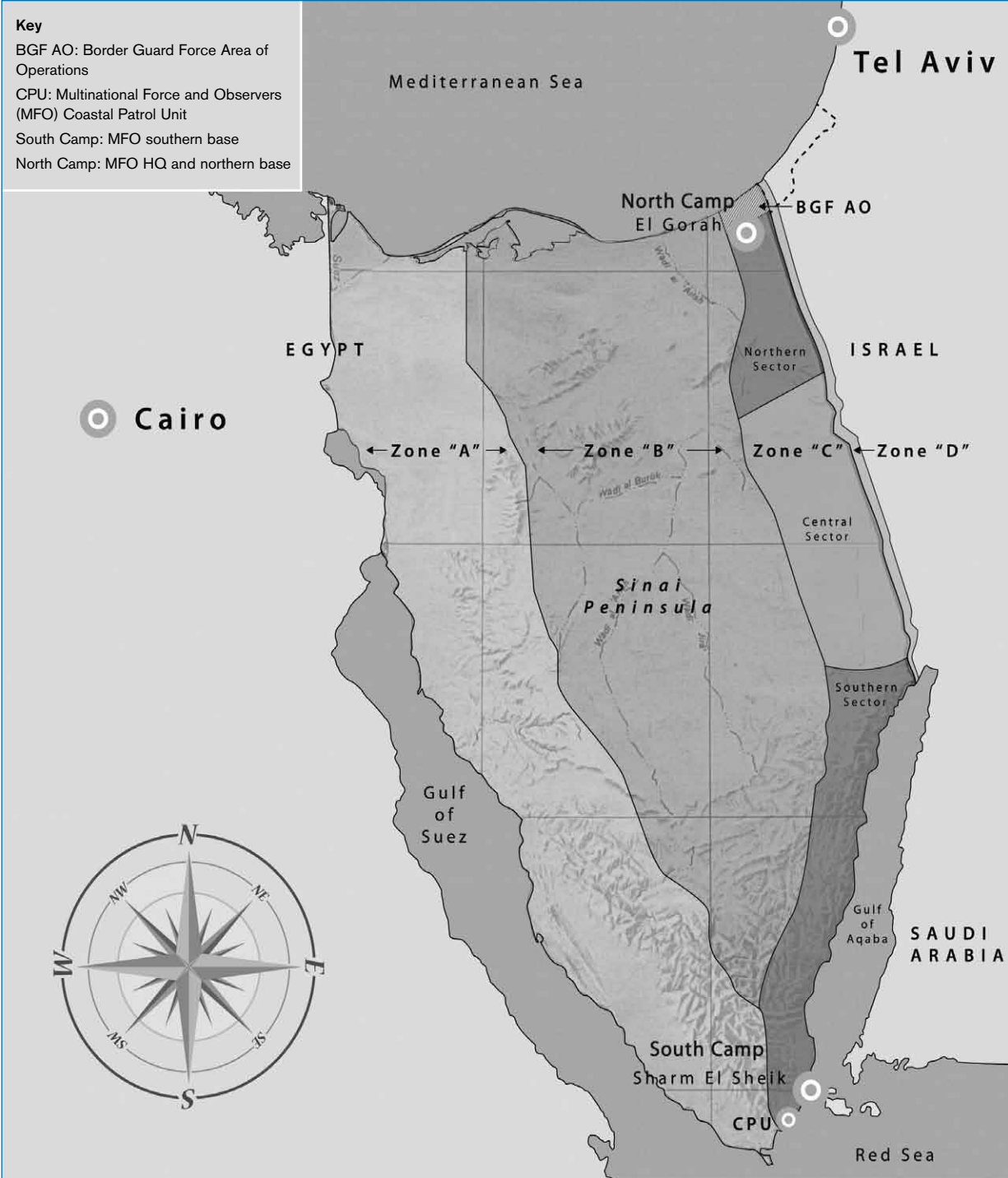
218 Interview, Israeli security official, Tel Aviv, July 2012.

219 'When we examine the subject of Sinai, we must examine it together with the situation in Gaza. This has to be part of a much broader strategy. I think that it would be wrong to handle the matter of Sinai disconnected from Gaza and it would be wrong to treat Gaza as disconnected from Sinai.' Former Mossad director Ephraim Halevy, speaking on Israeli Radio, 19 June 2012. 'This terror attack now mandates security and intelligence cooperation among the three sovereigns in the region: Israel, Egypt and Hamas. These three are all threatened by this global Islamic terror, and now they are obligated to cooperate. Curiously, a convergence of interests has been created among these three entities, even though they have no affinity for each other.' Israeli regional security analyst, Guy Bechor, 'A Terror Attack that Mandates New Three-Way Cooperation: Israel-Egypt-Hamas', writing on his blog, Gplanet.co.il, 8 August 2012.

Encouragingly, the state and quasi-state actors on the ground have displayed greater pragmatism. The Netanyahu government's prisoner exchange with Hamas in October 2011, mediated via Egypt, has already indicated that all three parties can cooperate effectively when they perceive it to be in their common interest. More formal understandings with Hamas could do much to facilitate the preservation of its relations with Egypt under Muslim Brotherhood rule, a core Israeli priority. Israel tends to view the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood as providing a more permissive atmosphere for jihadi groups to operate, but both the lessons from Gaza and the Egyptian authorities' response to the August 2012 attacks suggest there is potential for it to be a moderating force. Currently, all three governments – Egypt, Israel and Hamas – are engaged in addressing the salafi threat. Greater security coordination between them could do much to fill Sinai's vacuum and re-establish regional stability that is currently lacking in a vital and volatile corner of the Middle East.

# Appendix A

Map 1: Sinai's demilitarized zones



Source: MFO.



# Appendix B

Map 2: The historical distribution of Bedouin tribes in Sinai



Source: Based on Clinton Bailey, *Bedouin Poetry: From Sinai and the Negev* (Saqi, 1991 and 2002). Reproduced by kind permission of Saqi Books.  
 This map shows the approximate distribution of Bedouin tribes and is neither an exhaustive picture nor an attempt to represent legal control over territory.



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