



المعهد المصري للدراسات
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

Islamic
Movements

30 NOVEMBER
2018

Jihadiist Situation in Egypt after Jan. Revolution

Ahmed Farid Mawlana



أعدت للمتقين



كنايب الفرغان

أقصر سناد



WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG

f Eipss.EG t Eis_EG

TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: info@eis-eg.org

Jihadiist Situation in Egypt after Jan. Revolution

Ahmed Farid Mawlana

The Egyptian Jihad Group almost disappeared within Egypt after Ayman al-Zawahri and most of his colleagues joined al-Qaeda; while his former deputy, Tharwat Salah was not able to reassemble the remnants of elements opposed to al-Zawahri's move. However, Salah was arrested in Iran after his departure from Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks (2001). Moreover, links between members of the Jihad Group in prisons have also been disrupted.

Following the January 25 revolution, the junta released all detainees and most political prisoners, including jihadists. Some of them traveled abroad, such as Ahmed Salama Mabrouk, who later became a prominent leader in al-Nusra Front of al-Nusra in the Levant. Some jihadists established a political party "The Islamic Party" to include veterans of jihadists who adopt views that allow political participation, including Saleh Jahin and Magdi Salem; while others were interested in the practice of preaching activity inside Egypt, such as Muhammad al-Zawahiri. Some jihadists, led by Ahmed Ashosh, formed a new group called, "The Mujahid Salafist Front". Others, such as Nabil Na'iem, joined the counterrevolution forces, or focused on settling accounts with their old comrades through constantly attacking them on satellite channels and newspapers such as Sayed Imam. However, no Jihadist elements were arrested except under a lawsuit known as the Nasr City cell.

While the first episode of this study discussed the jihadist movement prior to the January Revolution (2011), this second episode addresses the jihadist situation in Egypt since the January Revolution up to the military coup on 3 July 2013, most prominently

the (Egyptian) Islamic Group as well as jihadist groups in Sinai, particularly Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqdis which later pledged allegiance to the Islamic State organization.

Islamic Group after the January Revolution

With the outbreak of the January Revolution (2011), some Islamic Group (IG) leaders, such as Essam Dirbala, Safwat Abdel Ghani, as well as many other IG cadres, supported participation in the revolution, while others, such as Nageh Ibrahim, defended former President Hosni Mubarak in a well-known article that he posted on the IG website on February 2, 2011, causing many differences among IG leaders. Accordingly, a general assembly was organized and internal elections were held, resulting in choosing a new elected IG board under the leadership of Essam Dirbala. Also, IG leaders that were still in prisons, such as Tariq al-Zumar, Rifa'i Taha and Mustafa Hamza, were later released by the junta; and most prominent leaders that were living abroad, such as Mohamed Islambouli and Osama Rushdie, started to return home. The IG then started to heal again and assemble under its new leadership; and in 2011 the IG established a political party, "Construction and Development Party", won 15 seats in the parliament in the 2011 elections, and began to return to the public scene after absence for a long time. However, the Islamic Group practices have demonstrated that it had abandoned armed action inside Egypt completely.

Jihadist groups in Sinai

The indiscriminate arrests of thousands of people in Sinai during the Mubarak era following the Taba, Sharm el-Sheikh and Nuweiba incidents led to a restive environment against the security services. Then, came the revolution events allowed the escape of detainees and prisoners from the Abu Zaabal, Marg, Wadi Al-Natroun, and Fayoum prisons, including hundreds of young jihadists and Sinai residents. This

occurred coincidentally with the return of some armed operations in Sinai during the revolution, such as the missile and machine gun attack on the headquarters of the State Security Investigations in Rafah on 29 January 2011, killing three of its personnel; and kidnapping three police officers and a non-commissioned officer near Arish on 4 February 2011.

After the removal of former President Hosni Mubarak, the military junta released all remaining political prisoners from Sinai. The families of those sentenced to death and imprisoned in the Taba bombing case held a sit-in outside the headquarters of the multinational forces. They detained 25 Chinese experts near the Lahaf area to press for the retrial of their relatives. On 13 February 2012, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi issued a decree allowing the retrial of those sentenced to death and imprisoned under the Taba bombing case, after their families had held a sit-in outside the multinational forces' headquarters and kidnapped 25 Chinese experts to press the junta for the retrial of their relatives. With the collapse of the police institution, the retreat of the state security apparatus, and the release of large numbers of jihadists from jail, some jihadist groups started to emerge in Sinai, such as the group of Ahmed Zayed and Kamal Allam (that escaped from the Abu Zaabal Prison during the revolution), who sought to resume their activity under the "Tawhid and Jihad" group.

Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqdis

The "Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqdis" (Supporters of Jerusalem) group is one of the most prominent jihadist groups that appeared in the Egyptian scene after the outbreak of the January 25 revolution, 2011, and became popular after the military coup in 2013. The jihadist group had operated under this name until November 2014, when it

pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (in a nine-minute audio released on Twitter) and changed its name to become “Sinai Province”.

the roots of the group which trace back to the “Tawhid and Jihad” group that carried out several attacks against tourists in the Sinai Peninsula in 2004 and 2005 (Tawhid and Jihad, formed in 2002, has also denounced Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected president, who had been a Muslim Brotherhood member, describing him as 'infidel'). Although the jihadist group's members engaged in bloody clashes with the security services during the period from 2004 to 2006, however the security services succeeded in dismantling most of its cells, killed and arrested its leaders and members. However, the detention camps during the Mubarak era only represented an arena for acquaintance among jihadists, where the Sinai detainees were merged with other jihadist ideologues, which helped to reinforce relations between different jihadist groups, and enabled them to share experiences. Also, the deterioration of relations between the Salafi jihadist groups in Gaza and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) following the events of the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque in Rafah in 2009 led to the flight of some Gazan jihadists to Sinai, and supported jihadists in Sinai. [On August 14, 2009, Salafi Jihadist Sheikh 'Abd Al-Latif Mousa denounced Hamas from the pulpit of the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque in Rafah and declared the formation of an Islamic Emirate in Gaza. Following prayers, Hamas security forces laid siege to the mosque and to surrounding buildings in which the rebels had taken up positions. The move reportedly left 22 people dead, including Mousa and a high-level Hamas military commander.]

Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqdis group had attempted to carry out its early operations against the Israeli army in 2010, but it did not succeed due to the unfavorable security situation

at the time. However, the January 25 revolution represented a major qualitative shift for the group, when hundreds of jihadists were released from prisons. The group first appeared in public early September 2011, when it claimed responsibility for an attack (August 18, 2011) against Israeli targets near the city of "Eilat".

The general strategy of the Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, was based on targeting Israel and its interests and preparing to confront the Egyptian regime. Therefore, in the aftermath of the military coup in 2013, the group engaged in direct confrontation with the police and army forces inside and outside Sinai. The study also addresses the group's organizational structure, location, and the substantive committees that it has formed. The study also tackles the group's strategy of armament and acquisition of military expertise, its efforts to infiltrate into sovereign institutions; the sites where explosives were manufactured and the booby-trapped vehicles were prepared; as well as the funding sources. The study also deals with the strategy of the group's operations in Sinai. After the military coup, the group adopted a policy of maintaining a gradual escalation of attacks to weaken the army and police forces and demoralize them, and at the same time targeting the economic interests of the regime: such as attacking gas pipelines that supply the army's cement factories with fuel, and the pipelines extended to Jordan; as well as targeting foreign tourists.

The strategy of the group's attacks outside Sinai relied on targeting centers of security command and control, such as security directorates and headquarters of military intelligence, in addition to assassinating senior security officials, and creating a state of security confusion and chaos through targeting police checkpoints systematically; within a scheme to weaken the security grip, and turn the state of popular anger aroused by the massacres committed by the regime during the dispersal of Rabaa and

Nahda sit-ins to a “jihadist” state that could gradually develop, enabling them to control police headquarters and military camps, and finally establish an Islamist regime.

However, the Egyptian regime intensified its security crackdown on the group, both inside and outside Sinai, and Israel assassinated some of the group cadres. The study introduces a timeline of the group's operations outside Sinai, starting from the military coup in 2013 until pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in 2014, and discusses the extent of the group's rapprochement with al-Qaeda before abandoning it in favor of pledging allegiance to Daesh, as well as the differences that erupted among the group cadres against the backdrop of allegiance to the Islamic State, resulting in the dissension of the group leader outside Sinai, Hisham Ashmawi, along with a number of his followers and establishing “Al-Murabitun” organization in 2015.

The study also introduces a demographic analysis of the data of some 200 persons accused of joining the group, including: the average age, the geographical distribution, and the nature of their career. This analysis has revealed that the average age of the group's members is 28 years, and that there is a majority of students and small businessmen among the organization ranks compared to the number of employees. The Ansar al-Maqdis group benefited from the experience gained by some of its elements through their participation in the Syrian revolution and through training in al-Qaeda camps in Yemen, as well as the experiences of a group of army officers such as:

1- Hisham Ashmawi, a former special forces (Thunderbolt) officer, had received advanced training on special operation tasks in main US training institutes. Later, he became the operations engineer of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis and in charge of the most

important qualitative operations carried out in Sinai, Cairo and Al-Farafra oasis. Ashmawi served in Sinai for 10 years and witnessed the bombings of Taba, Sharm El-Sheikh and Dahab. In 2007, a military court transferred Ashmawi to an administrative post and then referred to retirement in 2009. He was completely expelled from the army in 2012.

2- Emad al-Din Abdel-Hamid, a former army commando, is from Alexandria. He was referred to civil service by a presidential decree for security reasons after adopting jihadism.

3- Walid Badr, a major in the Egyptian army, is from Quesna, Menoufia. He was dismissed from service in 2005 for his religious ideas. He joined fighting in Afghanistan and Syria.

Influence of IS and al-Qaeda differences on Jihadist situation in Egypt

In fact, the conflict between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State around the world, particularly in the Levant, reflected on the internal situation of the jihadist organizations in Egypt, particularly in Sinai. Differences among the Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqqdis leaders and cadres quickly erupted on allegiance to either entity. While most the Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqqdis affiliated groups pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, other groups outside Sinai were against this move. Finally, these differences resulted in the dissension of Hisham Ashmawi, a prominent leader of Ansar al-Bayt al-Maqqdis outside Sinai, along with a number of his followers and establishing “Al-Murabitun” organization in 2015, which apparently was closer to the al-Qaeda ideology.

*Read the full study in Arabic [here](#)