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Development of the military situation in Sinai – April

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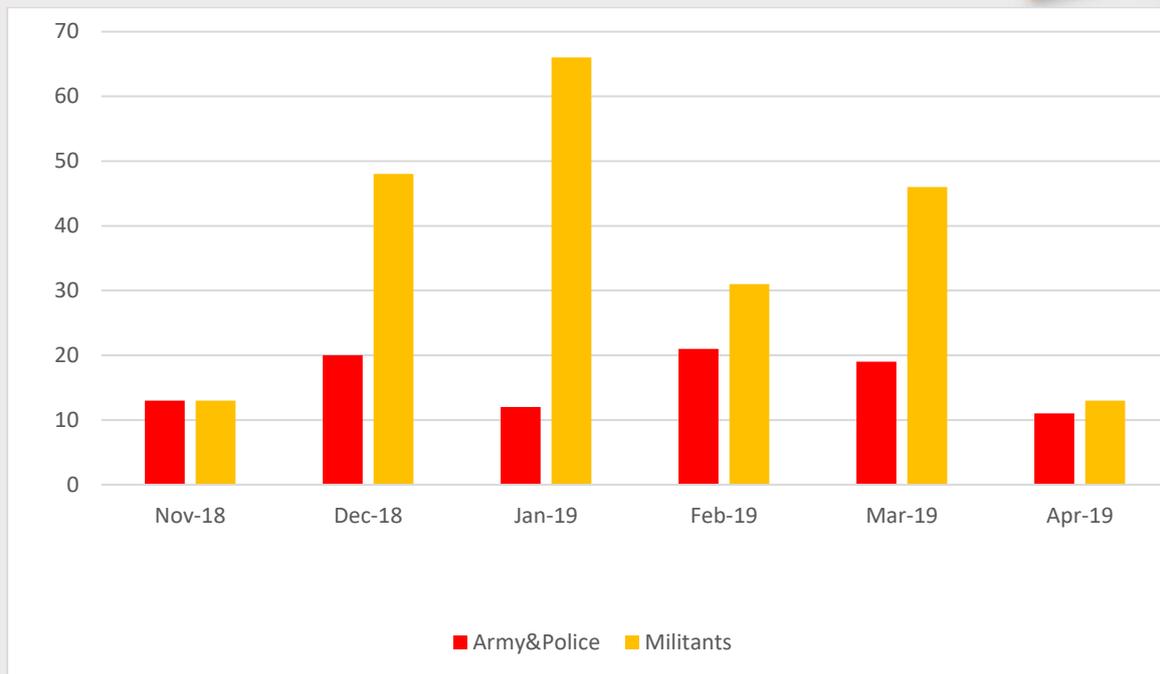
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During April 2019, the curfew imposed on North Sinai was maintained, and the staff of the Education Administration and the North Sinai Education Directorate were forced to participate in the referendum on constitutional amendments. At the same time, there have been high losses among citizens as a result of the operations of the Islamic State's local affiliate, Sinai Province. On the other hand, the government continued to raze farms and demolish houses in the city of Rafah, as well as arable lands and buildings located in the vicinity of El Arish airport.

In this report we will review the course of military and security operations during March in the Sinai Peninsula, as follows:

Military and security developments

The following graph shows a comparison between the military losses of the two conflicting parties during the last six months, according to sources from both parties as well as the monitoring of the [Egyptian Institute of Studies](#):



First: Casualties and Losses as declared by the Army and militants

- Following are the casualties and losses during April 2019 disseminated from the Egyptian Army communiqués and the statements declared by militants as well as media reports:

1- Casualties and Losses as Declared by Egyptian Interior Ministry

Although the military spokesman did not issue any military statements during April, however, the Egyptian Ministry of Interior issued two statements: (1) (2), where the first (11 April) announced the liquidation of 11 people under the pretext of being militants that resisted arrest in the area of Abu Eita in Arish, and the second statement (12 April) announced that the security forces succeeded in responding to an armed attack targeting the Oyoun Mousa security checkpoint and killed two of the attackers.

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Security forces dismantle an explosive belt of one of the attackers on the Oyoum Mousa Checkpoint

2- Casualties and Losses as Declared by militants and media reports

According to what was monitored by the [Egyptian Institute for Political and Strategic Studies](#) in April, the casualties and losses of the army and police forces were as follows:

- At least 11 military personnel, including 3 officers, were killed,
- One pro- regime tribal militant was killed,
- At least 5 soldiers were injured.

At the level of operations, the IS-affiliate Sinai Province launched a failed attack against the Army in southern Sinai and engaged in various clashes with the army forces in Rafah and to the south of El Arish city. One of the militants of the IS-local affiliate organization blew himself up using an explosive belt, targeting a police force. The explosion destroyed the force but also killed 3 civilians and injured 26 others. During

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the month, we monitored the use of sniper weapons by the IS twice, as well as the use of 10 anti-tank and anti-personnel explosive devices. The attacks resulted in destroying 11 military vehicles and a vehicle used by the pro-army tribal militias.

Second: Overview of the developments of the military campaign in Sinai Peninsula

Following is an overview of the developments of the military operations in Sinai Peninsula during March 2019:

The Islamic State organization in April released a video, where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the militant organization, vowed to seek revenge for its loss of territory. Al-Baghdadi has not been seen since 2014, when he proclaimed from Mosul the creation of a "caliphate" across parts of Syria and Iraq. In this new footage, Baghdadi acknowledged defeat at Baghuz, the group's last stronghold in the region. The footage was posted on the militant group's al-Furqan media network. One of the objectives of the appearance of al-Baghdadi is to respond to rumors that he had been killed, and to instill enthusiasm in the members of the militant organization. During his speech, Baghdadi mourned Abu Walid Sinawi, one of the IS leaders in the Baghuz.

Sinai Province, the IS-affiliate in Sinai, participated in the revenge operation launched by the parent organization through an operation they carried out on 9 April in the city of Sheikh Zuwaid, that we will address in the following lines. Our assessment and observations on the military campaign in April 2019 are as follows:

1- In view of the graph that shows a comparison between the military losses of the two conflicting parties – the army and police on the one hand and the militants on the other – during the last six months, the losses of the army and police forces have not decreased significantly, while the IS is keen on inflicting losses at fixed rates among army and police forces.

2- Due to the high rate of casualties among civilians during April as a result of the attacks carried out by the Sinai Province (5 killed, including a child, and 27 injured), the militant organization is expected to suffer further weakness as a result of provoking all components of the surrounding environment.

3- As for the losses among the militants: if we exclude the extrajudicial killings among civilians – those that are physically liquidated by the Egyptian Ministry of Interior's National Security Service after being arrested and forcibly disappeared and declared as killed in alleged clashes – we will find that the losses among insurgents is significantly low due to several factors, including their limited numbers and withdrawal of some militants from the organization, which makes it difficult to track the remaining small groups.

4- At the level of qualitative attacks, the Sinai Province organization carried out two attacks, one on 9 April, when a militant targeted a police force belonging to the Sheikh Zuwaid Police Station, where he blew himself up. The Interior Ministry's statement said the explosion killed two officers, two personnel, and three civilians, and injured 26 others. Surprisingly, however, the interior ministry's statement stated that the attack was carried out by "a suicide bomber of about 15 years old", which was not true,

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as the organization released a picture of the attacker, called "Abu Hagar al-Masry" almost in his 40s with a short beard including some grey hair.



During the IS preparation of the militant who blew himself up targeting a police force in Sheikh Zuwaid

5- The second attack carried out by the Sinai Province organization took place in the South Sinai governorate, where the organization was able to transfer two militants, "a foreigner from the Caucasus region and an Egyptian from Sinai, from the North Sinai governorate to the South Sinai governorate, despite the tight security measures. On Friday, 12 April, the militants attacked the Oyoum Mousa security checkpoint, where the attackers were killed with undeclared number of casualties among the checkpoint force. This attack, albeit a failure, is a message of the militant organization's continued ability to infiltrate into South Sinai and target security forces in a way that affects the movement of tourism.

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A blood-stained helmet of a soldier targeted at Oyoun Mousa by one of the attackers

6- Al-Arish witnessed a state of disturbance among the security forces on 14 April after information about seeing a militant wearing an explosive belt in the city. It is noteworthy that the army and police forces have set up many checkpoints and barriers to prevent the infiltration of militants into the city for carrying out kidnappings.

7- A group belonging to the IS Sinai Province is active in planting improvised explosive devices on the international road west of the city of Arish. On 9 April, the group targeted a military vehicle with improvised explosive devices resulting in the death of a civilian and his son and injuring his wife. On 24 April, detonation of an improvised explosive device damaged two cars and wounded six people.

9- The Egyptian air force continued to focus its air raids on the western and southern areas of Rafah and areas south of Sheikh Zuwaid.

10- The Egyptian regime continued to adopt the policy of physical liquidation of the disappeared. The did not publish the pictures of the dead after human rights activists analyzed photographs from previous statements and proved that the dead were bound at the time of their execution and even the names of some of the victims. The Interior Ministry's National Security Service liquidated 11 citizens on 11 April in a building in Abu Eita area in El Arish, according to the interior Ministry statement.

Third: Israeli drone attacks and violation of sovereignty

In April, there was an increase in the number of air raids launched by the Egyptian regime and "Israel" on areas of western and southern Rafah and the south of Sheikh Zweid and Arish in North Sinai, where more than 38 air strikes were detected on 15 and 16 April, as follows:

- On April 15, drones launched nearly four joint air raids by Israeli and Egyptian air forces on the villages of al-Muqata'a and al-Tumah, south of Sheikh Zuwaid.
- On April 16, two Israeli drones were spotted in the Egyptian Rafah area. Two drones were seen flying over the villages of Al-Dhahir, Al-Hakur and Al-Kharafin south of Sheikh Zuwaid and two were flying over the villages of Balata and Rafah. More than 30 joint air raids by the "Israeli" and Egyptian air forces were monitored on areas to the west and south of Rafah and south of Sheikh Zuwaid.
- On 18 April, two Israeli drones were monitored over the villages west of the city of Arish.

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It is noteworthy that intervention of “Israeli” drones in Sinai has been taking place on a regular basis since 2011, and Egypt began to pay attention to the use of these drones since 2016.

