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## Development of the military situation in Sinai – Oct.

### Haitham Ghoneim

In October, the IS-local affiliate organization, Sinai Province, carried out attacks in various areas in North Sinai governorate, not only in Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid but also in Bir al-Abed area and in Rommaneh area, in addition to targeting police buses in al-Hasana area, central Sinai. According to local reports, the Egyptian army's air force succeeded in targeting one car belonging to militants in Bir al-Abed; but on the other hand, the army committed two massacres against civilians, resulting in the killing of 16 citizens, including 5 women and 4 children, on 12 and 19 October, one in the city of Bir al-Abed and the other south of Sheikh Zuweid. It is noteworthy that during the army's 31<sup>st</sup> educational seminar in October, Sisi said that the level of security control and stability in Sinai has greatly improved.

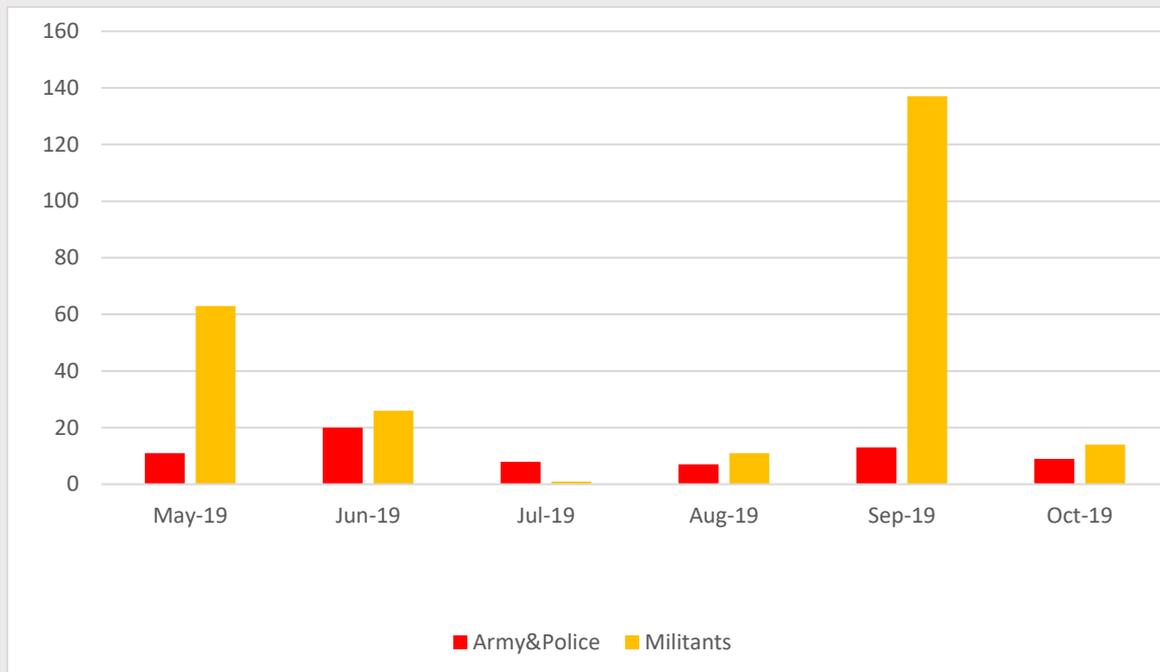
The policy of physical liquidation and enforced disappearance adopted by the Ministry of Interior's National Security Sector continued, where the interior ministry this month announced the liquidation of 13 people for alleged armed clashes. This comes amid fears about the fate of 16 citizens who have been forcibly disappeared since they ended a three-year prison sentence in case No. 148 – Military.

On the other hand, the Sinai Peninsula witnessed the arrival of the Nile water for the first time through the Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah Canal to the Bir al-Abed station, as part of the Al-Salam Canal project, amid fears that this comes within the framework of the 'deal of the century' that requires delivery of Nile water to the occupied Palestinian territories occupied by "Israel".

In this report, we will review the course of military and security operations during October 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 September 2019 disseminated through the Egyptian Army communiques and the statements declared by militants as well as media reports:

### 1- Casualties and losses as declared by the military spokesman and the Egyptian Interior Ministry

While the military spokesman did not issue any military statement related to military operations in Sinai during October, the Egyptian Ministry of Interior issued two (1) (2) statements on October 10 and 29 respectively. The first statement stated that the security forces were able to thwart an attempt to target one of the security forces checkpoints in El Arish. The second statement said that 13 citizens were killed in an alleged shoot-out during a raid on an abandoned house inside a farm in Al-Hoss neighborhood within the scope of El-Arish Police Station. In fact, this type of statements indicates that the Ministry of Interior's security forces committed the physical liquidation crime against a number of the forcibly disappeared citizens that they already hold.

## 2- Casualties and losses as declared by militants and media report:

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

- At least 9 military personnel were killed, including at least 2 officers; and 26 others were injured.
- At the level of operations, we noticed that there was continued activity of the Sinai Province during this month in areas of Sheikh Zuwaid, Rafah through south of El-Arish up to the city of Bir al-Abed, where the militant organization engaged in 7 armed clashes against the army forces and carried out attacks on checkpoints in the Rawdah and Joal in the center of the city of Bir al-Abed. During October, we monitored the IS local affiliate organization's use of sniping weapons seven times, the detonation of 15 anti-tank explosive devices and the firing of 2 rocket-propelled grenades. The operations resulted in the destruction/damage of at least 19 military vehicles.

## 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 October 2019:*

The month of October witnessed various attacks by the Islamic State in several areas (Rafah, Sheikh Zuwaid, El-Arish, Bir al-Abed, Rommaneh, and Hasana area, Central Sinai), which proves failure of the security policy adopted by the army and police forces during the comprehensive Operation Sinai-2018 and before. The military strikes have contributed to weakening the militant organization in terms of personnel and equipment, but it has also led to redeployment of the Sinai Province's militants outside their former areas of presence, reinforcing presence in new areas. It is not known whether this is surprising to the military leadership or it is done deliberately to push the remaining members of the militant organization to move to new areas, where the military leadership plans to raze agricultural lands and evict population under the pretext of combating terrorism, something that is feared by residents of al-Toffaha area of Bir al-Abed center.

Our assessment and observations on the developments in the military scene this month were as follows:

November 27, 2019

- 1- The military activity of the IS operatives escalated against the army forces in the evacuated area of Rafah, Sheikh Zuwaid and Bir al-Abed area, amid local fears that the military might exploit this razing agricultural land and forced displacement of citizens under the pretext of combatting terrorism.
- 2- October witnessed intensive air strikes by Egyptian air forces in areas east of the city of Bir al-Abed.
- 3- IS operatives in the Sheikh Zuwaid carried out successful attacks in the areas of Al-Ajra and Abu Tawila, east and southwest of the city of Sheikh Zuwaid.
- 4- Inside the city of El-Arish, the Ministry of Interior announced foiling an attack by a person wearing an explosive belt who tried to target its forces. According to the published photos of the incident as well as eyewitnesses the incident is real, where the attacker died after a grenade exploded in his hand while holding it.



*A grenade exploded in the hand of an attacking militant*

- 5- In the area between the west of El-Arish city and the eastern city of Bir al-Abed, the IS militant organization was able to inflict casualties and losses on the army and police forces, killing Lt. Mohamed Omar al-Darbashi and 6 recruits in one of the operations. In Bir al-Abed the Sinai Province

carried out attacks on a security checkpoint, and targeted armored vehicles and Hummer vehicles in the area of Bir al-Abed with IEDs.

6- The militants attacked army forces in the vicinity of Ja'al area, south of Bir al-Abed by detonating explosive devices against the forces. The militants also attacked an army checkpoint in al-Rawdha area west of El-Arish city in North Sinai. Responding to these attacks, the army forces carried out air strikes, some of which were indiscriminate, resulting in frequent civilian casualties.

7- The IS militants appeared in the city of Rommaneh, west of North Sinai Governorate, where a sniper belonging to the militant organization targeted Colonel Mohamed El-Minawi and two of his companions whose wounds were described as extremely serious. In general, the Sinai Province used sniper weapons several times during this month. In several areas, including south of Rafah, where a soldier was targeted in a security checkpoint.

8- In central Sinai, militants opened fire on buses belonging to the police forces on the road to Baghdad village, Al-Hasana, where eight soldiers were injured and taken to Ismailia hospital.

9- The army forces set up a new military checkpoint west of El-Arish city, and the security forces erected new checkpoints east of Bir al-Abed city to curb the movement of IS militants, amid fears of civilians that the army forces may bulldoze agricultural land and evict residents from areas east of Bir al-Abed and Toffaha under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

10- Continued physical liquidation of detainees who are forcibly disappeared as a security policy in response to attacks due to poor training. On October 29, the Egyptian National Security Sector announced liquidation of 13 citizens in an alleged shoot-out during a raid on an abandoned house inside a farm in Al-Hoss neighborhood, El-Arish.

### Third: Israeli drone attacks and violation of sovereignty

During October, we did not monitor any "Israeli" raids during October. However, we monitored at least a number 22 air strikes by Egyptian warplanes that mostly focused on areas east of the city center of Bir al-Abed.

It is noteworthy that intervention of "Israeli" drones in Sinai has been taking place on a regular basis since 2011, but Egypt has started to pay attention to the use of drones in Sinai since 2016.