

MOUNTING THREATS TO ISRAEL



ISIS IN THE SINAI PENINSULA

Situated along Israel's southern border, the Sinai Peninsula is experiencing the highest level of instability since 1979, when Israel agreed to return it to Egypt in exchange for peace. Today, the Sinai Peninsula is home to a formidable chapter of the Islamic State (ISIS), which is increasingly engaging the Egyptian army. ISIS openly states its intention to attack the Jewish state, and violence threatens to spill into Israel.

ISIS is operating in the Sinai Peninsula.

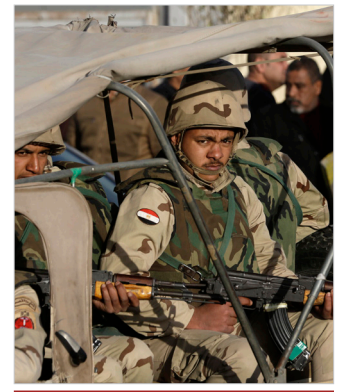
The Sinai chapter of ISIS, also known as Sinai Province, was formally established in late 2014, when the Sinai-based Salafist-jihadi group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) pledged its allegiance to the "caliphate." Previously, ABM had declared war on the Egyptian government following the 2013 overthrow of Egyptian President Mohammad Morsi. ISIS' estimated 2,000 Sinai fighters have inflicted hundreds of casualties on the Egyptian army. In November 2015, it claimed responsibility for the bombing of a Russian Metrojet flying out of Sharm el-Sheikh, killing all 224 people on board.

ISIS possesses a small but versatile arsenal.

ISIS' arsenal contains a small but diversified cache of weapons, including anti-tank and anti-air systems—mostly transferred from Libya—as well as Grad rockets, rocket propelled grenades, mortars, and advanced shoulder-mounted anti-aircraft systems. The group reportedly has coordinated weapons transfers from Hamas in Gaza, and is attempting to secure additional advanced weaponry.

ISIS is proving resilient.

Heavy fighting between the Egyptian army and ISIS is now in its sixth year, but the Sinai Peninsula is no closer to being secured. Egyptian forces have deployed twelve brigades—a total of 10,000 troops, including a regiment of counter-terrorism special forces—in Zone C of the Sinai, which directly borders Israel. Egypt has brought Apache helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, artillery, and armor to the fight. By contrast, ISIS' fighting force is approximately one-fifth the size of the Egyptian forces. Despite taking hundreds of casualties, ISIS appears to be increasing in numbers and capacity. In August 2015, hundreds of its fighters carried out five simultaneous attacks on Egyptian security facilities. Despite harsh Egyptian retaliation, ISIS has been able to conduct further terrorist attacks, including several recent bombings and shootings targeting Egypt's Coptic Christian community.



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ISIS intends to target Israel.

ISIS has openly declared its intentions to attack Israel. Before joining ISIS, the group was originally known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis—“Supporters of the Holy House [Jerusalem’s Temple Mount].” Its core ideology demanded the “liberation” of Jerusalem. The group has demonstrated its intentions by launching missiles into Israeli population centers, conducting multiple attacks on Israeli soldiers, and firing rockets into Israel’s southern port of Eilat in February 2017. ABM, and now ISIS, specifically list Egypt’s alliance with Israel as a reason to target the Egyptian army.

Israel has been forced to take defensive action.

Given the threats facing Israel from ISIS and other elements attempting to penetrate Israel, the IDF has been forced to strengthen its border defenses. Israel has completed a 15-foot-high security fence along its entire 125-mile long border between the Negev desert and the Sinai Peninsula at an estimated cost of more than \$450 million. It has also increased land patrols along its border with Egypt and naval patrol activity in the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. As Egypt has destroyed smuggling tunnels between Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula, smugglers have moved further south requiring the IDF to maintain a constant presence.

THE WAY FORWARD

The United States has long defined Israel’s survival and security as important to its national interests. Accordingly, America provides Israel with annual security assistance to help it defend itself, by itself, against mounting threats across the region. Security assistance is currently provided at levels established by 10-year Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between the allies. In 2016, the United States and Israel signed a new 10-year MOU that commits America to providing Israel \$38 billion beginning in 2019, \$5 billion of which will be set aside for joint missile defense. Each year, Congress appropriates security assistance funds for Israel, and AIPAC works with Congress to ensure full funding levels set out in each MOU are met. America must continue to ensure that Israel has the resources needed to respond decisively to threats ranging from Hezbollah to a potentially nuclear armed Iran.



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