



The Threat from the Sinai

Since the fall of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, many things have changed in Egypt. Unfortunately, some of these changes have negatively affected the country and its neighbors.

One particularly far-reaching and troublesome development is evident in the Sinai Peninsula, where increasing lawlessness endangers lives in Egypt and in Israel, hurts economic growth, and threatens regional stability. In just a short time, the area has become notorious for chaos and security risks, fueled by a radicalized and long-repressed Bedouin community alongside a waning police presence.

Islamist groups, including al-Qaida-inspired militants, now operate with impunity in the Sinai, using the area for training as well as planning and perpetrating terrorist attacks. They have also taken advantage of the lawlessness in the Peninsula to smuggle weapons from Libya to terrorist groups in Gaza.

Last August, a group of terrorists infiltrated Israel from the Sinai near the Israeli city of Eilat. Armed with heavy weapons, guns and explosives, they launched attacks on a passenger bus, a military patrol and a private car, leaving eight Israelis dead and injuring some thirty more.

Since the beginning of this year, the Sinai has seen clashes between security forces and the local Bedouin population, multiple bombings of a gas pipeline carrying fuel to Israel and Jordan, and several cases of foreign nationals being taken hostage and even killed. In March, plans to carry out another terrorist attack from the Sinai were thwarted when Israel killed the leader of the group plotting the attack in a pinpoint airstrike.

One of Israel's quietest borders for many years has now become its most deadly. The increased terror threat from the Sinai has forced the Israel Defense Forces to accelerate the construction of a southern border fence and revolutionize its approach to the daily operations along the border. Elite infantry forces now patrol the area, anti-tank ditches are being dug and sophisticated weapons systems are being put into place.

The United States has an important role to play in maintaining peaceful relations between Egypt and Israel, and ensuring security along Israel's southern border. By making use of the close relationship it has with Cairo, the United States can ensure that Egypt abides by its international obligations, including the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, and better control the Sinai.

Adjusting to the new threat is costly as much as it is time-consuming, requiring Israel to shift precious resources to the Sinai border. Under such circumstances, continued American military assistance to the Jewish state is more important than ever.