



# Quick Look Report

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## Mosque Egypt attack

**Event Date: 24 November 2017**

**Report Date: 27 November 2017**

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## 1) Key Facts:

1. Egypt has suffered on Friday 24th November the worst attack in its history.
2. Already there are 305 dead, including 27 children, and at least 128 injured in the bomb attack on Friday.
3. The attack targeted the al Rawdah mosque, in the north Sinai Region.
4. Between 25-30 armed men carried out the assault on the mosque
5. After two detonated bombs, gunmen waiting outside the mosque opened fire to the people who fled frightened
6. Before security arrived, they opened fire on ambulances transporting injuries
7. The mosque that was attacked is known for being the birthplace of

Sufi cleric Sheikh Eid al-Jariri, the founder of Sufism in the Sinai Peninsula.

8. Sufism is a mystical branch of Islam considered heretical by some ultra-orthodox Muslims.



## 2) Background and other related events

More than three years of fighting has failed to crush an insurgency

waged by the local Islamic State affiliate, Wilayat al-Sinai (the Governorate of Sinai), which is

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also blamed for bombing attacks on churches in Cairo and other cities, killing dozens of Christians. It had also carried out the previous deadliest attack in Sinai when it downed a Russian passenger jet carrying tourists back from the resort of Sharm el-Sheikh in 2015, killing 224 people.

Earlier this year Isis in Egypt had focused its assaults on Egypt's

Christian minority and killed dozens in at least four attacks.

In July, extremists killed 23 soldiers, including five officers, in an attack on a military checkpoint.

### **3) Description:**

The mode of action of this attack is novel, with the explosion of a bomb and followed by a strong shooting that lasted for more than fifteen minutes. The official version indicates that between 25 and 30 perpetrators of the assault were masked and dressed in military uniforms. They burst into the vicinity of the mosque aboard five SUVs that carried a black banner of the self-styled Islamic State, took up positions in front of the main door and the twelve windows on the front of the building and opened fire with the automatic weapons they

carried against believers congregated in the popular prayer of noon. In addition, he set fire to seven cars owned by the faithfully and blocked the aid of the victims by firing at the ambulances. The attack, which has not yet been claimed by any group, comes just a week after the Wilayat al-Sinai the activation Egyptian branch of the IS, that has its bastion in the north of Sinai: it urged the inhabitants of the enclave to stop performing Sufi rituals in the mosque that this Friday was the scene of the attack. According to some local media,

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the Sufi Sheikh in charge of directing the prayers fulfilled the order and the residents of the town, fearful, they chose to close the road that runs next to the mosque to traffic. The assailants, however, managed to overcome all obstacles and reach an area in which the presence of security forces is limited, compared to the military and police deployment

that exists in the vicinity of the cities of Al Arish, Rafah and Sheikh Zueid, where so far concentrated the main terrorist actions of the IS subsidiary, one of its most organized and dangerous franchises following the succession of territorial defeats suffered by the organization that Abu Bakr leads to Baghdad in Syria and Iraq.



Damaged vehicles are seen after a bomb exploded at Al Rawdah mosque in Bir Al-Abed, Egypt November 25, 2017. REUTERS/Mohamed Soliman

#### 4) Assessment:

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Last Friday the terror that hits again. Friday is the day dedicated to prayer in Islam but it seems that terrorism no longer knows limits. The attack, with bombs and light weapons, has been the worst attack in the recent history of Egypt.

Since last December, Egypt has experienced a series of attacks against Coptic Christians. For this reason, the country has been in a state of emergency since April.

The terrorists have chosen an easy target because the mosques in Egypt are not monitored by the security forces, as are the churches that have already been targeted recently. In addition, the attacked mosque was used by the local tribe al-Sawarka, known for cooperating with security forces in the fight against jihadist groups.

This attack on the Al Rauda mosque has been considered an attack on the

"core of Egyptian Sufism and one of the pillars of Egyptian Islam." among other reasons because the deceased Sufi Sheikh is now worshiped by the Sinai tribes. Sufis worship figures they consider divine and who are governed by a strict interpretation of Islam.

On November 19, 2016 the Daesh terrorist group Wilayat al-Sinai posted a video of the beheading of a prominent Sinai Sufi leader, Abu Haraz, who was accused by the group of "practicing magic".

The Sinai Peninsula gathered all the elements necessary to convert it into a powder factory after the coup d'état of 2013. Some of these elements are its orography, its geographical location, mixture of religions and history. Finally, it has been like this with the establishment of the Wilaya Sina.

## **5) Other information:**

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Wilayat al-Sinai is one of more than a dozen Isis affiliates established by high command around the Middle East in 2014. As elsewhere, Isis leaders in Iraq used an existing local group as a base for expansion in Egypt. While other "governorates", such as those in Libya and Algeria, have been almost entirely eliminated, Isis in Egypt has established a potent capability despite the continual efforts of the Egyptian authorities to destroy it.

ISIS in Sinai is very different from ISIS, the terrorist group that currently occupied much of Iraq and Syria. Above all, it is a local jihadist group that feeds on the disagreements and complaints that the people of the Sinai Peninsula have with the Egyptian state.

### **How did the terrorist group in the Sinai?**

For a long time, the Sinai has been a region with a lot of jihadist activity, and the peninsula, with its desert to the north and its mountains to the south, very difficult to control. Egyptian security forces can only deploy very limited equipment and troops because the area is supposed to be a demilitarized neutral zone between Egypt and Israel.

In addition, the indigenous Bedouin population has been isolated from economic development and infrastructure. Many Bedouin villages

do not even have electricity or running water. While most tribal leaders are against religious violence and many even fight against ISIS, some Bedouins have joined the group and are part of their ranks.

Security in Sinai deteriorated further after the departure of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. One of the main jihadist groups that emerged at that time was Ansar Baital-Maqdis, or "Champions of the Holy House", in reference to Jerusalem and the main objective of the group fighting against Israel. He took responsibility for several attacks against Egyptian security forces and several bombings against a gas pipeline connecting Egypt with Israel and Jordan.

In 2013, Abdel Fattah Sisi took office as president of Egypt and launched strong measures against jihadist groups in the Sinai and other areas.

It also separated more in the local population and gave rise to the emergence of the Wilayat Sinai group or "Sinai Province" of Ansar Bait al-Maqdis.

### **What do we know about the leader of Al Wilayat Sinai?**

Its leader is Abu Osama al-Masri. This name of war refers to his loyalty to Osama bin Laden, while al-Masri

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means "Egypt" in Arabic, in order to show that he is Egyptian.

Al-Masri led more attacks against the Egyptian security forces but also against Israel. In 2014, he pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

It is believed that the ISIS branch in Sinai operates mostly in the northern Sinai area near the border with Gaza and Israel. According to reports, it owns mostly light weapons, but also some portable missiles against aircraft.

### **Why attack Salafist?**

ISIS's war on the Sufi's in Sinai stems from the tenets of its Salafi faith. The Salafi-jihadi stream aims to purge Islam of what it considers polytheistic elements, and therefore vigorously targets the Sufi stream. Salafi-jihadis, including ISIS, see Sufis as heretics, particularly because of their veneration of saints, considered worship of others beside Allah. In all the regions under their control, ISIS has systematically destroyed the tombs of Sufi saints as well as ritual sites and buildings belonging to Sufi tariqas, or orders. ISIS Sinai's approach is no exception.

On November 18, 2016, Sinai province released photos of the beheading of Sufi elder in Sinai Sulaiman Abu Haraz, who had been kidnapped a month earlier. The photos, which

sparked outrage in Sinai, Egypt, and the Arab world, constituted another milestone in the ongoing war waged by jihadis against Sufis, which includes destroying buildings, threatening members of Sufi orders, kidnapping and killing sheikhs, and more.

On December 8, 2016, ISIS's official weekly news bulletin Al-Naba published an interview with the head of the hisba in ISIS's "Sinai Province." The interview, published several weeks after the beheading of Sheikh Abu Haraz, was largely dedicated to the fight against the Sufis. Describing the presence of Sufis in Sinai, the head of the hisba said: "The Sufi stream in Sinai consists of two main orders, the 'Alawi-Ahmadi order and the Jariri order." He added: "As for the Jariri order, it has three main centers: the Al-Arab mosque in Ismailia and the Sa'ud mosque in the Sharqia governorate, both of which are in Egypt proper, and in Sinai it has the Al-Rawdah mosque...", this last one is the mosque where it has suffered this terrorist attacks.

He also mentioned: "We say to all the sheikhs and members of the Sufi centers inside and outside Sinai that we will not tolerate the existence of Sufi centers in Sinai or in Egypt at large. All we want is to guide you to the straight path. So 'let us agree to worship only God, and not to ascribe any partner to Him (Quran 3:36),' and

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let the Quran and the Sunna be our judges. We say to you, learn monotheism and the Islamic faith, and the transgressions that nullify them. Learn that those who wage jihad for the sake of Allah embark on war and jihad only in order to consolidate monotheism and remove polytheism, and that they sacrifice their blood to fight the most arrogant of the heretical nations on earth. By Allah, they do not fear those who condemn them. Know that we considered you to be heretical polytheists, and that we consider it permissible to shed your defiled blood. But we preach to you and call upon you to repent. We want you to adhere

to Islam and to the straight path. We want you to adhere to the path of the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad, and of those who followed him..."

The targeting of Sinai's Sufis have taken several forms. Local residents have told how masked armed men kidnap people participating in rituals, how explosives are placed outside Sufi mosques, and how tombs of saints are blown up.

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