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Discord in the Desert:

Egypt's Sinai Peninsula in the aftermath of the Arab Spring

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Abstract

The Sinai Peninsula's security environment has altered significantly since President Mubarak's overthrow in January 2011. Though Sinai has a history of militant Islamism, prior to 2011 violence was uncommon and limited in scope. Today, conflict is widespread and described by commentators as an insurgency. Violence has increased in frequency and is qualitatively different. Violence has also spilt beyond Sinai, affecting not just Egypt, but Israel and the wider region.

This thesis maps how the Arab Spring has affected Sinai's security environment. This is important as continued security deterioration demonstrates that Egypt's actions there have failed. To explain why, this thesis provides a framework for understanding the security environment's principal actors: Egypt, Israel, Gaza, militant Islamists and the Bedouin. Mapping Sinai's security environment explains the nature of post-Mubarak changes and how these actors influenced these changes. The thesis demonstrates that regardless of the government in Cairo, Egypt's military has controlled Sinai's security and has viewed it through a solely security-based lens.

To map the causes of these changes this thesis considers three themes. First, it demonstrates how Mubarak-era marginalisation of Sinai's Bedouin politically, economically and socially has continued following the Arab Spring. Such marginalisation distances the Bedouin from the Egyptian state, and creates an environment susceptible to militant Islamism. Second, the thesis shows that Egyptian-Israeli security cooperation in Sinai has reached its zenith post-Arab Spring, with Israel allowing Egyptian re-militarisation of Sinai to combat militant Islamists. This thesis also argues that any approach that ignores the economic needs of the Bedouin and Gaza's population will fail, with Bedouin's reliance on the Egypt-Gaza tunnel trade distancing them economically from the Egyptian authorities. Last, whilst explaining the varied backgrounds of Sinai's militant Islamists, this thesis demonstrates that the

post-Morsi intensification of violence results from a coalescence of goals between militants and the Bedouin.

Egypt’s current security-centric ‘separate, silence and neutralise’ strategy will not succeed. Whilst requiring military force tailored for counter-insurgency, Egypt’s strategy must include Bedouin economic development that integrates rather than isolates Gaza. Commencing at the governorate level, this must be combined with Bedouin political and social integration within the Egyptian state.

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Translation and Transliteration

In producing this thesis place names have been spelt according to common English usage, for example El Arish and Sheikh Zuweid. Arabic names of prominent political figures have likewise been spelt according to their preferred English spelling, for example al-Sisi and Morsi. This standardisation does not apply to citations and quotes, the contents of which are reproduced verbatim. The definite article ‘al’ appears in lower case and hyphenated with its respective noun, for example al-Qaʿida. In exception to this, the definite article is capitalised where it begins a sentence or is customarily capitalised, for example Al Monitor.

Glossary

ABM	Ansar Bait al-Maqdis
AQSP	Al-Qaʿida in Sinai Peninsula
COU	Civilian Observer Unit
EIJ	Egyptian Islamic Jihad
FJP	Freedom and Justice Party
IDF	Israeli Defence Force
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IG	Islamic Group
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
MFO	Multinational Force and Observers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
SSIS	State Security Investigation Service
TAC	Tunnels Affairs Commission
UN	United Nations
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force