



NATO Foundation  
Defense College

## Emerging Challenges December 2017

### **Egypt attack on December 24th 2017**

On November 24th 2017 a terrorist attack cause hundreds of victims inside Egypt's al Rawda Mosque during midday prayer. According to the official narrative, the death toll from the attack, the bloodiest in modern Egyptian history, stands at 305, including 27 children. Egypt's Public Prosecutor issued a statement saying that the attackers arrived at the al Rawda mosque in five SUVs, some wearing combat fatigues, some masked, heavily armed, and bearing the black banner of ISIS.

The last attack was the first time Wilayat Sinai targeted a Muslim house of worship. In the past, their violence was focused on army and police checkpoints and positions in the northeastern Sinai. In the past year, they've attacked a Coptic cathedral in Cairo, a church in the Nile Delta city of Tanta and another on the Mediterranean port of Alexandria. On October 2015, the group claimed responsibility for the downing of Metrojet flight 9268, killing all 224 passengers and crew on board.

Saw H.A. Hellyer (Senior non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council and Royal United Services Institute) states: “the Christian attacks (in Egypt), seemed aimed at creating some sort of divide within Egyptian society, the radical groups could then take advantage of. They failed. Now they're going after anybody that doesn't support what they want to do”.

It's possible that they specifically targeted the al Rawda mosque because it is affiliated with a local Sufi order, the Jaririya. Sufis are Islamic mystics and have traditionally shunned violence. ISIS considers Sufis to be heretics, and in Syria and Iraq, they have destroyed Sufi shrines and bulldozed or dynamited the tombs of Sufi saints, indeed, an Isis propaganda outlet had previously published an interview with the commander of its morality police in Sinai who said their “first priority was to combat the manifestations of polytheism including Sufism”. In addition, ISIS has frequently listed Sufis among “heretics” and “soothsayers”. In 2016, the group executed a 97 years old Sufi cleric in Sinai, and in the January issue of its online Rumiya magazine, it listed the l Rawda mosque among Sufi “lodges” and places of worship to be targeted.

The Egyptian president al-Sisi, said: “This act will only increase our will and unity. The police and military will avenge our martyrs and restore peace and security. We will respond with brute force to combat these terrorists and deviants ... This is an attempt to deter us from fighting terrorism and to destroy our will, but we are steadfast, and I say to all Egyptians, the battle you are fighting is the most honourable.”

In the sheer massacre, experts say ISIS may not only have lost its target viewers but has pushed them to the side of the government. It would be a strategic leak for ISIS, which has thrived by obtaining the trust of outcasts communities across the Arab world. In the Sinai, local communities and tribes have been considerably interrupted from Cairo, in light of development and job opportunities over the past

two decades. Groups affiliated with ISIS such as Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, now named ISIS Sinai Province, promised to furnish ward against the government. The Egyptian army's reply has been harsh, an at times indiscriminate campaign that has resulted in diffuse civilian victims and arrests, and accuse of torture, bringing life to a halt.

Finally, The last attack has united Sinai tribes in oppositions to ISIS, many signing up to join the Egyptian military's operation and publicly urging all tribesmen to join the fight against ISIS. The Union of Sinai tribes, a grouping of one-dozen clans formed in the opposite of the rising influence of ISIS, issued a statement calling on its followers to join the military in its operations against militants south of Rafah, warning ISIS and jihadists that they will not sleep until they cleanse their land of every last takfiri. The statement read: "We call on all men and youths of Sinai tribes to join their brothers ... to coordinate a greater operation with the army to completely end this black terrorism", and "our men will not sleep until you are punished for your crimes. We do not have courts or prisons," said the statement, which vowed, "we will kill you and not take you with mercy."

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