

The Islamic State's Colonial Policy in Egypt and Libya

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Abstract

The battle of the Sinai and the Libyan fronts recently intensified as soldiers of the Islamic State carried out multiple operations that shattered any hope of confidence the crusaders could have in the *mutadd* puppets maintaining control in the face of the *Khalifah's* expansion.

Keywords: Islamic state; Colonial Policy; Political science; Security

Introduction

Within the last two years jihadist terrorism has challenged Egyptian and Libyan security. Islamist violence rages in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and jihadi groups have spread across Libya [1]. While terror campaigns in these states do have historical precedents the recent assaults have a dynamic edge due to the Islamic State's (IS) emergence in the Post Arab Spring era. The group's expansion into Egypt and Libya exacerbates long simmering security problems.

These developments need to be examined within IS' *wiliyat* or provinces strategy as the group embarks on expanding its "caliphate". This essay assesses how IS terrorism differs from past jihadist campaigns in Egypt and Libya and how this new round of terror complicates Egyptian and Libyan security. While the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) terror waves were degraded in the 1990's, other groups reappeared to renew the jihadist struggle [2]. Egypt's Sinai Peninsula has witnessed varying levels of terrorism for over thirty years.

Today's jihadist violence also reflects IS' struggle with Al Qaeda (AQ). Since January 2014 thousands of fighters in Syria have died in infighting between IS and rival Islamists [3]. The Islamic State's ideological extremism, its rejection of AQ's ruling to disengage from the Syrian battlefield and its unwillingness to submit to Shura council reconciliation led to its February 2014 expulsion from AQ's network. IS' English language magazine *Dabiq* rails against Al Qaeda and its regional branches for not being faithful to its true Islamic vision [4]. It has sought to fracture AQ's network and *Dabiq's* November 2014 Remaining and Expanding issue announced the creation of Algerian, Egyptian, Libyan, Saudi, and Yemeni *wilayats* that featured militants declaring their loyalty to Baghdadi's organization [5]. Egypt and Libya are critical for IS' expansion for the former provides it a gateway to attack Israel and the latter an opportunity to build its network in a lawless anarchic state [6]. Libya's proximity to European shores, furthermore, allows the network a base to launch operations against the West. Harleen Gambhir argues that IS' *wilayat* policy is a coordinated strategy to survive the U.S. led military campaign, cut into Al Qaeda's fragmented network and project the caliphate's resilience [7]. Ultimately IS' "caliphate" aspires to integrate its Egyptian, Algerian and Libyan *wilayats* in a united front against crusader and apostate adversaries.

Recently there has been a rapid expansion of IS affiliated activity across North Africa. Egyptian Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis' (ABM) November 2014 IS support pledge and the caliphate's creation of Libyan *wilayats* incorporated local jihadist groups [8]. IS' *wilayats*, however, face multiple opponents including regime forces and rival jihadists. Violence in Libya, for example, is punctuated by clashes between IS

and jihadist opponents in Sirte and Derna.

This jihadist activity paradoxically occurs after a period of Islamist renunciation of armed force. Only a decade ago Libyan and Egyptian jihadist groups had participated in de-radicalization programs. Groups like al Jama al-Islamiyya and LIFG disbanded [9]. LIFG and Jama al-Islamiyya's demobilization were offered as evidence that jihadist extremists could make the transition to "peaceful" Islamic activism. Optimism about Islamist societal co-existence with regional governments increased after the toppling of the Mubarak, Ben Ali and Qaddafi regimes.

The *Arab Spring* was viewed as a catalyst for Islamist democratic accommodation. This sanguinity terminated as the *Arab Spring* matured producing chaos and instability. Today very few observers are optimistic about the region's capacity to undertake a stable democratic transition. Egypt and Libya are affected by these developments as the former evolves into a military dictatorship and latter toward state collapse.

Regionally we may be entering an environment with little historical precedent. Under IS' patronage, Egyptian and Libyan jihadism have opportunities to succeed where past efforts failed. The Islamic State's Iraqi-Syrian proto jihadist state supports its growing network with fighters, arms, media expertise and funds. IS's media operations have called for fighters to travel to travel to multiple fronts including Libya augmenting the fighting capacity of its *wilayats* [10]. Past Egyptian and Libyan jihadist campaigns lacked this degree of external support. The analysis of Post Arab Spring jihadist violence in Egypt and Libya proceeds on three levels. First, the impact of the *Arab Spring* on jihadist violence in Egypt and Libya is assessed. Second, IS' network effectiveness as an incubator of jihadist terrorism is examined. Third, the essay explores the obstacles that confront IS *wiliyat* expansion strategy in Egypt and Libya. It concludes that multiple forces in Egypt and Libya may limit IS growth and development.

Arab spring turmoil and regime change

Many analysts have commented upon Mideast's resistance to democratization [11]. Culture, religion and the authoritarian states are offered as explanations for the lack of democratic reform. Experts

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predicted the durability of authoritarian regimes. Unsurprisingly they were shocked by the 2011 protests movements in Tunisia and Egypt that triggered the fall of once durable regimes. Some suggested that the Arab Spring was confined to isolated cases and the movement would have limited impact. Writing in Foreign Affairs Michael Böning predicted the protests would not seriously threaten the Assad regime. [12]. Once deemed impregnable the Mubarak, Ben Ali and Gaddafi regimes fell in short order. Most surprising were developments in Egypt.

The Pharaoh's fall and a renewed Jihadist campaign

The Mubarak regime's demise was attributed to many factors [13]. Among these were: (1) the use of social media to organize protests and expose government atrocities (2); the unity of protest groups in demanding that Mubarak step down; (3) the catalyzing effects of high profile killings of protesters in spreading the civil protest movement; and (4) the role of the military in forcing Mubarak from power. Soon afterward the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as the largest organized political movement in 2012 winning parliamentary and presidential elections. Al Qaeda leaders were perplexed by the rapidity of the Arab Spring but bin Laden sensed an opportunity to expand his network [14]. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its early democratic experience was opposed by AQ that condemned the organization's betrayal of Islamic values. Some observers argued the MB's development suggested a viable democratic Islamist alternative to violent jihadism [15].

The contradictory nature of Muslim Brotherhoods governance dashed the Egypt's democratic aspirations. Allegations of corruption, economic woes and autocratic rule progressively weakened Morsi's government, undermining its popularity [16]. The rise of radical jihadist movements in the lawless Sinai was furthered by Morsi's weakening of security services and his amnesty of Islamists political prisoners [17]. The Muslim Brotherhood's insistence on constitutional reform and the centrality of Sharia law in Egypt's legal system engendered mass opposition. During this period, Morsi's efforts to reorganize the military encountered stiff resistance from the army's hierarchy that felt its preeminent economic and political status in Egyptian society threatened. As the economic situation worsened, mass citizen protests for the army's removal of the MB rose appreciably. These pressures reached a critical mass during the summer 2013 and the army intervened to remove the government and facilitate another "democratic transition". Personified by General Marshall Abdel Fattah al-Sissi autocratic rule, the military engaged in mass repression of MB jailing its leadership and demoralizing the organizations rank and file. In his *Washington Institute* study of the Egyptian Brotherhood Eric Trager noted that the hierarchical character of MB's organization made it vulnerable to the army's decapitation strategy [18]. The resulting leadership void in the MB inhibited its "passive resistance" and protest strategy against Field Marshall Sissi's government. The post military coup period included mass killing and imprisonment of the MB's leadership and its rank and file. By some estimates the government had killed over 1,000 MB members and imprisoned over 10,000 militants [19]. High profile trials and death sentences of hundreds of Brotherhood members including its head Mohammad Badie and former President Morsi accused of murdering policeman were greeted with little resistance. The military's repression of the MB backed by the public led to Sissi's retirement from the army and his transition to successful presidential candidate. Unmonitored by international observers his May 2014 election as President Sissi consolidated his hold on the Egyptian national psyche as the only man capable of keeping Egypt safe from terrorism [20]. When nominated by Morsi's government as top

commander of the army, Sissi was viewed as a pro-Islamist general. In light of subsequent events such interpretations were erroneous. His brutal crackdown of the MB ignited a round of jihadist terrorism in the Sinai. The government's repressive campaign played into the hands of radical jihadists whose ranks were augmented by prisoner amnesty program and the regime's weakening of security services. Reacting to Morsi's fall and the military's seizure of the government, AQ reached out to the Islamists rank and file. In her study of AQ's response to the Arab Spring Nelly Lahoud argues its leadership saw Egypt as an important front in the jihadist war and a strategic opportunity for expansion [21]. Such a reaction is not surprising given the prominence of Egyptian commanders like Zawahiri in AQ's historic formation and hierarchy. Historically Egypt has been the focus of past jihadist insurgencies for three decades that surged and ebbed. Past Sinai jihadist terror campaigns had failed because of insufficient popular support. Given its anarchy, supportive Bedouin tribes and vulnerable seaside tourist resorts, the Sinai had been a magnet for jihadist terrorists [22]. Quiescent during Israeli occupation the radicalization of the Bedouin soon occurred after the return of Egyptian rule for they resisted Cairo's centralizing initiatives. Sinai's border with Gaza allowed inter-fertilization of Palestinian and Egyptian jihadist movements and the construction of an arms smuggling network. The Gaza connection and the emergence of Islamist Hamas as the *de facto* power in the territory after the Israeli withdraw led Egyptian jihadists to embrace the Palestinian struggle. During Morsi's regime, his relaxation of security measures assisted the flow of weapons and bomb making materials across the Gaza border fortifying Hamas' armed capacity. These forces rejuvenated the jihadist cause in the Sinai. The overthrow of Morsi's government united Peninsula jihadist forces impelling them to resist the military coup and the Muslim Brotherhood's mass repression [23]. Formed in February 2011 Ansar Bayt al- Maqdis (ABM) was a Salafi-jihadist organization operating in the Sinai and the Gaza Strip. Built upon anti-Zionist and Islamist ideologies, the network hoped to overthrow the Egyptian state and liberate Jerusalem. The group launched attacks against Israeli and Egyptian interests. Sinai's natural gas pipeline that fuels Israel and Jordan's population was repeatedly targeted. Troublesome during Morsi's reign, ABM was reinvigorated by the July 2013 overthrow of Morsi's government. ABM launched hundreds of attacks against Egyptian police, army and security installations killing 350 police and soldiers [24]. Combined with government counter strikes against the network's leaders and members, close to a thousand people have died since the July coup. ABM's rapid growth was facilitated by the global jihadi community. The group's relationship with Al Qaeda's Yemeni and Maghreb branches and the flow of sophisticated arms and foreign fighters across the region has increased its offensive ability. Prior to its incorporation into the Islamic State's network, ABM communicated messages across Al Qaeda media organizations. Its assaults against the Egyptian state include targeted assassinations, bombings of security complexes in Islamiyya, Mansoura and Cairo, gas pipeline attacks, a tourist bus assault and an unsuccessful attempt to kill Egypt's interior minister. Like its EJI predecessor ABM's declared a war against Egypt's state and society. Its fanatical pursuit of jihadist violence may be augmented under IS patronage. Some observers worry about a possible terror attack against the Suez Canal [25]. In 2013 a cargo ship was attacked by Islamist radicals armed with rifle propelled grenades. With more sophisticated weapons, the network could launch a devastating strike against the Canal with potentially disastrous consequences for the Egyptian economy. *The Long War Journal* reports over 270 attacks in the Sinai by jihadi organizations since the July coup [26]. The Egyptian military offensive in the Sinai has resulted in many civilian deaths and has alienated

Bedouin tribes some of whom are ABM's allies. Egypt, however, has experienced past terrorist violence that eventually dissipated. The Sinai was a flashpoint for jihadi organization a decade ago with dramatic attacks in southern resorts killing hundreds of foreign tourists and Egyptians. Buttressed by coordination with Israeli intelligence, Egypt's military offensive killed some of the terror networks commanders and hundreds of its militants [27]. Despite the fierce army's campaign, the group is resilient and its November 2014 ISIS incorporation may augment ABM's armed and financial capability. Reportedly negotiated by IS representative and 9-11 Hamburg cell recruiter Mohammed Zammar, the ABM-IS merger gives Baghdadi's network a major presence in Egypt [28]. ABM's incorporation into ISIS was driven by a number of forces. Forced by the army's construction of a security corridor around Gaza and the government's crackdown, the group needed additional lines of financial and weapons support. ABM had numerous incentives in align with IS given the latter's Iraqi-Syrian proto state, ideological appeal, training, arms and financing capabilities [29]. Not all ABM militants, however, agreed with the merger and one faction renamed Ajnad Misr (Soldiers of Egypt) broke away from the network claiming fidelity to Al Qaeda [30]. Other factors had an impact. Daveed Gartensein-Ross argues that government's killing of AQ oriented leaders allowed a new and more militant leadership amenable to IS affiliation to emerge [31]. Recognized in Dabiq 5, ABM's pledged bay'ah to Baghdadi's caliphate. Along with other November 2014 pledges of support from Algerian, Yemeni, Saudi, Pakistani and Libyan jihadists, IS's hopes to expand its territorial domain. Reorganized into Wilayat Sinai, the jihadist movement is poised to receive money, fighters and arms.

Since its November 2014 bay'ah Egyptian IS jihadists have targeted security services and energy infrastructure and moved away from supporting the Palestinian struggle. In December 2014 Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for attacks on natural gas pipelines running to Jordan and attacks against military vehicles [32]. A month later the network launched a complex series of attacks against security forces across the Sinai killing over 40 police and military personnel [33]. In the 7th issue of Dabiq *The Extinction of the Grey Zone* IS hails Wilayat Sinai January 2015 assaults against Sissi's *murtadd* army.

The government's response has also taken a toll on the leadership hierarchy and its rank and file. The Egyptian military reported in February 2015 it had killed 172 Sinai militants, arrested 229 terrorist suspects and destroyed some 85 hideouts [34]. At present, the jihadist insurgency seems contained. Given a strong Egyptian state committed to a full scale war against jihadists IS expansion policy may be limited to the historically "ungovernable" Sinai. The same cannot be said of Libya

Libya and its post Qaddafi chaos

Libya presents a more fertile ground for IS expansion. The chaos of the Post Qaddafi period offers a good environment for jihadist recruitment. This is not surprising given the prominence of Islamist militias centered in Benghazi. Like the Egyptian case Al Qaeda saw an opportunity to expand its network. In a Combating Terrorism Center study of Al Qaeda's Abbottabad compound correspondence, al Qaeda's leaders commented on Libya centrality in a renewed jihadist struggle [35].

Such potential is echoed in past Islamist revolts. The country's restive eastern tribes have historically played a role in the development of a native jihadist movement. Inspired by the GIA revolts in Algeria, the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group* (LIFG) bloody insurgent campaign in the 90's ended in failure [36]. As in Algeria factions of the LIFG

agreed to an amnesty and demobilization campaigns, effectively transitioning to a nonviolent Islamist social and political movement.

Recalcitrant jihadist militants were held in check by Qaddafi's iron rule that kept the country stable until the *Arab Spring*. Beyond brute repression, the quiescence of the Islamist movement was a mere chimera. Repeating past patterns in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan regime efforts to coopt Islamist groups paradoxically encouraged their capacity to wage war against the state that could be mobilized at a more propitious time. With the *Arab Spring's* turmoil Islamist militias assisted in the violent overthrow of Qaddafi's regime and eventually were able to establish some territorial control.

Rebel success was abetted by the regime's nepotism, repression and weakening of the Libyan military which acted synergistically to embolden the protest movement. Qaddafi hollowed out the Libyan state and stripped the army of resources and autonomy [37]. Led by Qaddafi sons, Special Forces brigades and intelligence services dominated the repressive apparatus of the state. Faced with protests that catalyzed into armed opposition, Qaddafi's regime savagely responded. The international community acting under a responsibility to protect doctrine used military force to restrain Qaddafi's repression of the protests [38]. What began as a human rights operation to insure that Tripoli did not slaughter opponents morphed into an UN and Arab League sanctioned NATO bombardment campaign to overthrow Qaddafi. After months of fighting the regime fell culminating in Qaddafi's brutal killing at the hands of enraged revolutionaries [39].

Militia attacks and NATO airstrikes accelerated the decomposition of the Libyan state. This chaotic situation was exacerbated by a succession of weak Post Qaddafi regimes that tried to coopt and finance hundreds of militias [40]. Tripoli's efforts to control militia behavior only enhanced their armed capacity and facilitated their seizure of land, oil fields, and power. Four years after the regime's collapse centrifugal pressures have accelerated and Libya has descended into a medieval world of competing vassal states divided by tribal, regional and ideological affiliations.

Traditionally a center of Islamic activism, eastern militias have seized vast tracks Libyan territory. Restive Benghazi became an epicenter of jihadist radicalism with al Qaeda affiliated Ansar al-Sharia a major player in Libya's terrorist violence [41]. The group's assault on the US embassy on September 11, 2012 resulting in the death of US ambassador Christopher Stevens vividly underscored the anti-Western orientation of Libya's resurgent jihadist movement. Soon it became apparent that western intervention had helped jihadist forces and unleashed a contagion of anarchic violence that has reverberated across Libya's borders [42].

The weakness of sub-Sahara state structures and tribal tensions historically has favored criminals, warlords, tribal militias and terrorist networks. With Qaddafi's overthrow these groups were empowered and this sequence of events catalyzed arms and contraband smuggling. The flow of arms and fighters across the Malian border facilitated Tuareg irredentist pressures in the restive north that had seen prior secessionist revolts. Trained as Qaddafi's mercenaries, Tuareg fighters returned home after regime's fall assisting an ethnic separatist revolt [43]. While initially supporting the revolt, jihadist groups like AQIM and Ansar al-Dine eventually displaced Tuareg militants and created a jihadists safe haven in north Mali ended by France's January 2013 military incursion [44]. Since the French operation, jihadist forces have repositioned along Libya's southern frontier committed to destabilize Bamako. While hoping to rapidly disengage from their Malian intervention, jihadist resilience and the Libyan chaos have

forced the French to remain in the region with a long term regional presence. Hoping to contain the jihadist menace, France's *Operation Barkhane* created a 3,000 strong rapid reaction force across 5 bases and it is positioned to strike at regional terror networks [45]. Given the presence of numerous jihadist groups in South Libya, the country is likely to be a key battleground featuring French military action.

The region's security problems are magnified by Libya's artificial borders and the salience of local ethno-tribal identities. There are complex ideological, tribal and regional forces at play that impair national unity and state sovereignty. The diverse terrain of militias, warlords and jihadist groups impair the consolidation of state power. Historically Libya has been divided between Eastern and Western tribal loyalties that have frustrated national development that, since the fall of Qaddafi, have widened [46]. The country has devolved into competing blocs featuring two rival governments divided by politics and religion. Libya's internationally recognized government in Tobruk relies on Qaddafi era loyalists and Zintani tribal militias representing a secular nationalist movement opposed to the Islamist regime based in Tripoli supported principally by Misrata based militias. Since the summer of 2014 these two blocs have warred against each other under the umbrella of different military campaigns. This conflict is dramatized by the emergence of the renegade General Khalifa al-Haftar whose history as a Qaddafi era loyalist has enraged opponents. Supported by the Libyan army and the Tobruk government, Haftar's May 2014 *Operation Dignity* sought to reverse Libya's descent into anarchy by combating pro-Islamist militias [47]. Haftar's war against the Islamists and Misrata based militias has inspired his rivals to counter his campaign with *Operation Libyan Dawn*. The fighting between these two blocs is complicated by a jihadist insurgency aiming to create a micro-state loyal to neither bloc [48]. Both Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi and Libyan factions of the Islamic State in Sirte and Derna have attempted governance in areas they control. Radical jihadists dot the landscape hoping to expand their territorial control. Based in Benghazi, Ansar al-Sharia and aligned Islamist groups drove Haftar forces from the city and they quickly established Sharia based governance. Forging alliances with local groups, IS militants and foreign fighters in Derna helped establish the Majlis Shura Shabaab al-Islam (MSSI) that envisions a Libyan version of the organization's medieval like rule in Raqqa, Syria [49]. Soon Sharia courts and religious police began to mete out draconian punishments based on a rigid and uncompromising interpretation of Islamic law. Using Derna as an initial base, IS would later expand to Sirte and accelerate a jihadist insurgency against Haftar's forces and the Tripoli based government [50]. Unlike Sinai Wilayat, IS' groups in Libya are secure enough to create governing structures and religious tribunals in the areas they control. [51] The state's decomposition has produced rival international allegiances with Turkish and Qatari support for the Tripoli based government and Egyptian and United Arab Emirate (UAE) support for Tobruk centered regime. Adding to this complex panorama of state implosion are ethnic Tuareg and Tabu movements aligned with Misrata militias. Haftar's Operation Dignity was given an additional impetus by Egyptian and UAE air campaigns designed to defeat *Operation Libyan Dawn* forces and forestall Islamist advances [52]. The Islamic State's February 2015 beheading of over twenty Egyptian Christians and its graphic video posting invited Egyptian air strikes against IS positions in Derna and Sirte [53]. The Egyptians are concerned that Libya will be a conduit for fighters and arms assisting the Sinai jihadists. They hope by strengthening Haftar's forces in Tobruk and weakening IS fledgling network they may be able to stem the flow of fighters and arms into the Sinai. Militia infighting has produced a devastated economy and the collapse of oil exports. Hoping to maximize their leverage and produce

chaos, rival groups have stymied oil production and IS jihadists have attacked refineries. The fall in oil production has pauperized an already chronically impoverished society [54-56]. The economic collapse of the country has expedited centrifugal pressures and the prospect for Islamic State expansion. With IS Sinai position, the prospect that Baghdadi's caliphate could implement its plan to link its Egyptian-Libyan *wilayats* is becoming alarmingly high. It is to this issue that we now turn.

IS Egyptian and Libyan Wilayat expansion

IS' advances in Egypt and Libya are part of a calculated strategy of expansion. November 2014 Dabiq's fifth edition Remaining and Expanding recognizes the bay'ah of Egyptian and Libyan jihadists and its incorporation of Ansar al-Sharia and MSSI into IS' territorial fold [57]. By creating Wilayats Sinai and Barqa, Tripolitania and Fezzan Libya, IS has opened multiple fronts in its terror war. It is a policy of resistance and self-affirmation. Reflecting on the series bay'ahs offered by Egyptian, Saudi, Algerian, Libyan and Yemeni jihadist groups, Aaron Zelin argues that IS' archipelago strategy aims to survive the international military campaign and displace Al Qaeda as the most dominant actor in the global jihadist movement [58]. By initiating new campaigns the Islamic State hopes to absorb local jihadist groups and, through its transnational caliphate centric approach, attract foreign fighters. Given its immense financial resources, armed capability and tens of thousands of fighters it can shift resources to different battlefields and offer local jihadist groups diverse incentives. Andrew Engel's argues foreign fighters and Libyans extremists returning from the Syrian and Iraqi battlefields play a prominent role in the newly created *wilayats* suggesting that IS' hierarchy has prioritized the Libyan struggle [59]. IS's evolving archipelago strategy, however, presents a number of organizational and security challenges. IS' remaining and expanding policy has employed a number of measures to coax unity and dissuade competitors. Its annexation of ABM and its incorporation of MSSI reflect a pragmatic adaptation and an effort to harmonize local insurgency with the needs of Baghdadi's caliphate project [60]. Where local jihadist groups Abu Slim Martyrs Brigade (ASMB) and Mujahideen Shura Council (MASC) have resisted IS encroachment as in Derna IS militants has fought them. If IS can consolidate jihadist forces this may propel the Sinai and Libyan insurgencies into a more radicalized ultra-violent direction. The flow of arms and weapons across the porous 600 mile long Egyptian-Libyan border could allow IS to accelerate IS insurgent activity. Libya's long shoreline and proximity to Italy, moreover, offers the caliphate the opportunity to exploit smuggling networks and penetrate the soft underbelly of Europe.

IS directed terror campaigns in Egypt and Libya have gained some momentum. The impact is particularly pronounced in Libya. IS attacks against Tripoli's Corinthia Hotel, assaults against foreign embassies, seizure of the town of Nawfaliyah and bombings of oil refining plants are a concerted campaign to plunge the country into chaos [61]. In the town of Qubba IS suicide bombers in early 2015 killed over forty people [62]. Since ABM's November 2014 bay'ah to the IS, the brutal jihadist campaign in the Sinai has been expanded. In June 2015 Wilayat Sinai launched attacks aimed at disrupting the tourist trade in Luxor killing two police officers and the ISIS branch attacked multinational observers monitoring the implementation of the 1979 Camp David accords. Wilayat Sinai a month later launched coordinated attacks against 15 army and police checkpoints and security installations in the northern city of Sheik Zuweid killing over 50 security personnel. By far Wilayat Sinai's most complex and lethal assault the July 1, 2015 attack was a complex synchronized assault featuring 70 jihadists using car bombs, martyrdom operations, mortars and rifle propelled grenades in

pitched battles against security forces [62]. The ferocity of the attacks may be a first step toward occupying territory. Increased violence is a potent media attraction and recruitment tool. IS has catapulted savage executions into a grotesque form of theatrical expression. IS Libyan operation have prominently featured grisly internet posted executions of Egyptian Copts and Ethiopian Christians [61]. Both ritualized filmed executions featured American and English accented jihadist spokespersons underscoring the international nature of these operations. In its internet posted video of the execution of Christian Copts IS's masked spokesperson promises that the Caliphate will conquer Rome from Libya's shores. *Dabiq* has publicized the battlefield achievements and charitable activities of its *wilayats* in Libya and Egypt. In *Dabiq*'s eight edition "The Libyan Arena" section IS opposes Libya's two rival governments as *murtaddin* and it hails its three *wilayat*'s battlefield exploits against apostate forces [62]. It is clear by the amount of coverage given these provinces activities, IS puts a premium on their expansion. Successful growth of its Egyptian and Libyan *wilayats*, however, is far from guaranteed. Given its two front war against established states and rival jihadists, IS is likely to encounter stiff resistance. Egypt and Libya offer diverse challenges, varying levels of state power and different opponents. The Egyptian and Libyan *wilayats* also need to maintain internal cohesion as they fight multiple adversaries in a protracted war complicated by its governance plans. Historically these challenges have bedeviled past jihadist insurgencies. Success in defeating opponents and establishing a jihadist micro-state requires a nimble and innovative strategy. The chart below looks at IS' opponents and possible strategies IS could employ to expand its Egyptian and Libyan *wilayats* system. The following sections elaborate upon this material (Table 1).

Obstacles facing IS expansion into Egypt and Libya

Wilayat Sinai and IS's Libyan provinces offer contrasting approaches to the caliphate's creation of its provinces. In Egypt IS absorbed an existing network while in Libya it had to cultivate its *wilayat* by expending resources, repatriating is Libyan fighters and coopting relatively weak jihadist groups. This is apparent in the use of foreign and returning fighters in the Libyan case and their relative absence in Egypt [61]. IS's veteran leaders like Bharani Turki al-Binali and Iraqi Abu Nabil al-Anbari have been an invaluable source of assistance in

building the movement from the bottom up [60]. They have provided the expertise, combat skill and capacity to build local alliances allowing IS to harmonize the exigencies of local insurgencies with the larger objectives of its caliphate project [60]. The contrasting approaches reflect different conditions and obstacles facing IS expansion in the two countries. This is connected to the asymmetries in state and jihadist resistance to IS encroachment. Regime turnover created very different trajectories in Libya and Egypt. This is largely due to institutional legacies beyond IS control. Among these are variances in the state strength that exists between the two nations. Egypt's strong state and its powerful army represent a formidable challenge to IS expansion beyond its Sinai base. Significantly *Wilayat Sinai* has not been able yet to seize territory and create governing structures.

Here the critical role of military professionalism and independence explain some of these differences. Since the 1973 Yom Kippur war Egyptians have historically deferred to the military and it is revered as a unifying and legitimate institution [61]. Its provision of advanced US arms makes the Egyptian army the most powerful in the Arab world. The military controls a vast business establishment and determines key government contracts, making it a dominant economic actor. Past Egyptian leaders (Sadat and Mubarak) were recruited from the armed forces creating legitimacy for military rule over Egyptian society. It's handing of the January 2012 revolts leading to the removal of Mubarak earned in popular backing of the Egyptian street [62]. Capitalizing on the role of the Egyptian army as guardian of the public trust Field Marshal Sissi was able to exploit popular disenchantment with the Morsi regime and engineer a July 2013 coup against the Islamists. His brutal repressive campaign against the "terroristic" Muslim Brotherhood is reportedly popular in Egyptian society and the army is considered to be the only institution that can prevent Egypt from sliding into a Libyan like anarchy [62]. This type of professionalism, legitimacy and competence is notably missing in the Libyan military. Qaddafi's successive reorganizations of the army fragmented the institution gutting it of its independence and coercive capacity. True power was held by his sons who commanded veritable Praetorian Guards that served at Qaddafi's disposal. The army's unprofessionalism and incompetence in fighting in past conflicts resulted in embarrassing failures [62]. With Qaddafi's death and the disbanding of his son's militias, Libya descended into a Hobbesian state of nature characterized

IS Wilayat	Regime Opposition	Jihadist Competitors	IS Strategy Wilyat Strategy
Wilayat Sinai	Sissi's strong state has declared war on Jihadists. Determined resistance from Egyptian military cooperating with Israel. Sinai has traditionally has been the site of jihadist activity	Hamas in Gaza. Muslim Brotherhood opposition. Little in the way of AQ affiliated organizations in Egypt. IS has yet to make inroads into Gaza with pro ISIS groups like Sheik Abu al-Nur al-Maqdisi battalion part of a fragmented group of pro-IS supporters in Gaza ABM breakaway groups loyal to AQ such as Afnad Misr	Use of operative Egyptian Mohammad Zammar to incorporate preexisting network ABM which is the most dominant group in Sinai Cooption of smaller groups Attract disaffected members of MB Not able to hold territory to impose and incipient state structure
Islamic State of Libya with provinces (Wilayats) in the east (Barqa), in the West(Tripolitania) and in the South(Fezzan)	Weak to collapsed Libyan state. Haftar forces aligned with what remains of the Libyan military. Egyptian and UAE incursions. Possible French intervention. No sign of US campaign air expanding and while US special forces have acted in the past seems little activity.	Complex contested terrain with AQIM, Ansar al Sharia, Mokhtar Belmokhtar group El Mourabitoun Misrata militias aligned with MB such as Farj al Libya Abu Slim Martyrs Brigade and Mujahideen Shura Council in Derna	Creation of new network by returning IS supported militants and Libyan fighters returning from Syria Creation of incipient state structures in religious outreach, education and morality Alignment with other groups in Benghazi, Derna and Sirte Cooperation with AQ linked Ansar al-Sharia have avoided open warfare with other jihadist groups unlike Syria

Table 1: Islamic State Wilayat Strategy in Egypt and Libya: Confronting State and Jihadist Resistance.

by militia rule and infighting. The security challenges faced by the Egyptian and Libyan militaries vary considerably. The July 2013 Coup in Egypt produced a coalescence of jihadist forces in the Sinai allowing IS to absorb an existing network. IS' terror network is helped by terrain in a historically ungovernable area where Bedouin tribe's hostility toward Cairo and widespread criminal smuggling networks assist its expansion [59]. While IS has few significant jihadist competitors in the Sinai it does confront a fierce Egyptian military intent on crushing its network and sealing off the Gazan and Libyan borders. While in Libya IS is helped by a weak state it is constrained by warlords, militias and ethnic- tribal forces. Patterns of local and tribal identities also militate against IS' ability to coalesce forces behind a transnational jihadist state. IS militants have violently clashed against rivals in Sirte, Benghazi and Derna. Formed by Tripoli based militias the Farj Libya have undertaken a military offensive against the group. With opposition from Haftar's forces, Zintani and Misrata militias and local warlords, the best IS might be able to achieve is control over a few towns. Even these gains can prove illusory. In mid-June 2015 Mujahidin Shura Council (MSC) jihadists drove IS forces from Derna in retaliation for their assassination of rival jihadist leaders and brutal rule in the town.

Much of IS potential success in Libya is dependent upon luring local jihadists. Recently controversy has been generated by reports that Mokhtar Belmokhtar's group El Mourabitoun has sworn fidelity to IS, a claim supported and rejected by different factions in the organization. Given the scope of its network, IS's courting of Ansar al-Sharia is critical. So far the two jihadist groups have had an ambiguous relationship characterized by conflict and cooperation. Aaron Zelin argues that Ansar al-Sharia's is in decline with defections to IS' growing network [60]. The organization, moreover, has been weakened by its street fighting with General Haftar's forces and the death of its historic leader Muhamad al-Zahawi. The defection of a leading ASL ideologue to IS, has given impetus to speculation of its merger into IS's ranks. This potential merger must be weighed against jihadist in-fighting in Sirte, Derna and Benghazi as rival groups resist IS encroachment. The caliphate's *wilayat* strategy success in Libya and Egypt depends upon its capacity to withstand the international military campaign against its Syrian-Iraq base. If IS can continue to attract foreign fighters and effectively defend its home base it may have the financial and offensive capacity to sustain multiple fronts in its remaining and expanding strategy [61]. Islamic State in Libya has expanded its offensive in Sirte repulsing opponents and has captured a large airport and electric generating plant. Given its media attention and resources expended Egypt and Libya are clearly important to IS inner hierarchy.

Egypt and Libya, however, don't have the confessional configuration that IS exploited in Syria and Iraq. Religious stratification plays into IS sectarian takfiri approach. Neither Egypt nor Libya has significant numbers of Shi'ite, Alawites, Sufis or Christians that allow IS to exploit sectarian passions. With this limiting factor, Egyptian state authority should be successful in containing and possibly rolling back IS expansion in Sinai while a complex array of opponents may limit its gains in Libya. Egypt's military campaign has succeeded in killing key leaders but has not abated the tenacity of the jihadist assault. While IS has grown in Libya's imploded state, diverse opponents militate against further expansion. Other factors may weigh against the success of IS wilayat policy. The networks extreme takfiri ideology could create countervailing pressures. IS is often compared with the equally barbaric GIA that convulsed Algeria in the 1990's who almost succeeded in destroying the country's social-political fabric before disintegrating when confronting external pressures and internal divisions [62]. Both Egypt and Libya have featured jihadist campaigns whose severe

bloodletting eroded popular support invariably leading to their demise. IS, however, with its transnational caliphate, vast resources and legions of foreign fighters differs dramatically from prior campaigns. What this suggests is that defeating the Baghdadi's transnational state and its wilayat system is likely to be long, protracted and bloody. Victory over IS and the degrading of its Egyptian and Libyan territories is anything but guaranteed.

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