



Terrorism Now Targeting Civilians in Egypt

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The ouster of Muhammad Mursi from Egypt's presidency a year ago and the violent roundup of his supporters that followed have led to a wave of terrorism across Egypt. Organized groups from the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt's interior exacted revenge against police, military and Interior Ministry officials they viewed as arresting, murdering and silencing their coreligionists. Such revenge attacks could be considered the first stage of post-Mursi terrorism. When Sinai-based militants resumed the regular bombing of the peninsula's pipeline, they referred to such operations as "economic warfare" against the state, forming the second stage of post-Mursi attacks. [1] Following the election of a new president, Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi, the former defense minister who ousted Mursi on July 3, 2013, Egypt has entered its third stage of post-Mursi terrorist attacks: those targeting civilians.

On June 25, a coordinated attack simultaneously targeted four Cairo metro stations during the rush hour commute (Ahram Online [Cairo], June 25). The bombs were rudimentary, causing no deaths and only six injuries. However, this was the first attack that did not target security forces, the state or those believed to be collaborating with them. No group claimed credit for the attack, but despite the primitive assembly of the improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the coordinated action suggested some degree of organization.

Indeed, this was not an isolated incident. Three nights later, an IED set off in a building still under construction in Giza killed a girl and her mother (Aswat Masriya [Cairo], June 28). Then, on the night of July 3 - the one-year anniversary of the coup that removed Mursi - a bomb ripped through a local train in Alexandria, which had not experienced the same level of anti-state violence as Egypt's capital (Ahram Online [Cairo], July 4). Nine were injured.

At the moment, it is unclear who is behind these attacks, or even if all three were carried out by the same organization. Egypt's Ministry of the Interior immediately blamed the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist group of which Mursi was a leading member and which the state has blamed for all terrorism in the country since his removal (Daily News Egypt, July 7; Middle East News Agency [Cairo], April 6).

Interior Ministry spokesman Major General Hany Abd al-Latif called the metro bombings "a failed attempt by the terrorist organization of the Muslim Brotherhood to endanger and threaten the state of national solidarity and stability the country is witnessing" (Daily News Egypt, June 25). As proof of the Brotherhood's involvement, Abd al-Latif said the security services were investigating one of the injured, whose phone contained pictures of the Raba'a al-Adawiya salute (al-Masry al-Youm [Cairo], June 25). The four-fingered salute (Raba'a means "fourth" in colloquial Egyptian Arabic) is used by the Brotherhood and its affiliated anti-coup alliance to represent their rejection of Mursi's ouster and to memorialize the brutality of Egypt's security forces in breaking up the pro-Mursi sit-in at the Raba'a al-Adawiya mosque in Nasr City in August 2013 (Daily News Egypt, August 16, 2013).

The problem with officially blaming all terrorism on the Brotherhood without evidence is that the credibility of the claim is questioned when members of the group are actually behind attacks. There is growing evidence that Brotherhood members and supporters are involved in terrorism, but little to suggest they are receiving orders from a central leadership.

On July 4, a blast at a poultry farm owned by a Brotherhood supporter in Egypt's Fayum governorate killed four people assembling an IED (Ahram Online [Cairo], July 4). Police announced the retrieval of roughly 20 armed explosives from the site (Daily News Egypt, July 4). The Brotherhood admitted its activists were in the house, but incredulously blamed the explosion on an "unknown person on a motorbike [that] threw a bomb into their house" (Ikhwanweb, July 4).

Whether these latest attacks are being carried out by Brotherhood members, Mursi supporters or anti-state militants, they are the first acts of terrorism targeting civilians since last summer.

Egypt's most active, most capable and most deadly terrorist group over the past year is the Sinai-based Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM - Supporters of Jerusalem). ABM has been active in Sinai since 2011, attacking Egypt's gas pipeline and attempting to degrade Egyptian-Israeli relations, but its broader threat to Egypt began after Mursi's ouster with attacks west of the Suez Canal (see Terrorism Monitor Briefs, March 6, 2012; December 3, 2013). ABM attempted to assassinate Egypt's interior minister in September 2013 and successfully attacked a number of security directorates around Egypt (al-Masry al-Youm [Cairo], September 5, 2013; Ahram Online [Cairo], December 24, 2013). In its statements, ABM has continuously threatened Egypt's security forces while claiming to be on the side of the Egyptian people. [2] As ABM's terror campaign continued into 2014, the group broadened its targeting to include not only the security services but also the economic drivers of the state, including natural gas and tourism.

The Giza-based Ajnad Misr (Soldiers of Egypt) organization also targets police, security forces and the state using increasingly sophisticated IEDs (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, July 10). The group's early attacks used very primitive devices (Aswat Masriya [Cairo], February 7). However, in its most recently claimed attacks, Ajnad Misr targeted the presidential palace with explosives it claimed were rigged to go off when specialists attempted to defuse the devices (Ahram Online [Cairo], June

30). Although Ajnad Misr identifies itself as a jihadi group, its rhetoric is similar to that of a radical revolutionary group. The organization named its terror campaign "Retribution is Life" as it sets out targeting "criminal" state forces (Ahram Online [Cairo], April 17).

The latest attacks in Cairo and Alexandria are not the first civilian casualties in Egypt's current confrontation with terrorism. ABM did target civilians in its February 2014 attack on a tour bus of South Koreans in Taba, South Sinai (Ahram Online, February 18, 2014). However, the group framed this attack not as one targeting civilians but as targeting state revenue (i.e. the tourist industry) [3]. Other direct attacks on civilians have included those on tribesmen that Sinai's militants accuse of collaborating with the Egyptian army (Ma'an News Agency, March 24). Over the past year, especially in the summer of 2013, there were also a large number of incidents of sectarian violence in which Mursi supporters and Salafi-Jihadists attacked churches, Christians and Christian-owned property out of antipathy for Coptic Christian support of the July 2013 coup (Mada Masr [Cairo], August 14, 2013). Of course, civilians were also occasionally killed during attacks targeting security forces (al-Masry al-Youm [Cairo], March 4). These latest incidents are, however, the first incidents in which civilians are targeted.

Groups like Ajnad Misr and Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis use their attacks against security forces to gain support from the segments of society that feel marginalized by the events of the past year: especially Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters. In their statements, these organizations present themselves as both defenders and avengers of Egypt's Muslims and they emphasize the care they take to avoid civilian casualties.

Attacks targeting civilians are different. Following the inauguration of a new president whose popularity is based on his tough image and security background, these attacks are not meant to gain followers among disgruntled Egyptians; they are carried out by disgruntled Egyptians as a warning to the supporters of Egypt's new government. The message being sent is clear: al-Sisi cannot keep you safe.

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Notes

1. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, "Statement of taking responsibility for targeting the gas pipeline which leads to the armed forces cement factory in central Sinai," January 19, 2014, <http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22announcement-of-our-responsibility-for-targeting-the-gas-line-leading-to-a-cement-factory-of-the-armed-forces-in-central-sinai22-en.pdf>.

2. See Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, "A Message to the conscripts of the army and police and their families," December 22, 2013, <http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22message-to-the-conscripts-from-the-army-and-policy-and-their-families22-en.pdf>.

3. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, "Declaration of responsibility for targeting the tourist bus in the port of Taba," February 17, 2014, <http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r->

bayt-al-maqdis-22declaration-of-the-responsibility-for-the-targeting-the-tourist-bus-in-the-port-of-e1b9adc481bc48122.pdf.

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