This document provides an overview of developments in the Mediterranean Basin and other regions of interest from 09 — 15 October, with hyperlinks to source material highlighted and underlined in the text. For more information on the topics below or other issues pertaining to the region, please contact the members of the Med Basin Team, or visit our website at www.cimicweb.org.

In Focus: Security in Sinai
By Trista Guertin

Following the signing of the 1979 Camp David Accords, the Sinai Peninsula, came under Egyptian authority, but largely remained an isolated, neglected and disenfranchised region, according to BBC. Under President Anwar Sadat (1970-1981), Sinai, inhabited mainly by indigenous Bedouin tribes, was never fully assimilated into mainland Egypt, and its economy and infrastructure were both largely relegated to the side-lines of Egyptian politics and development. Sinai, a geopolitically strategic area situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea and bordering Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory of Gaza, remained mired in poverty. The population resorted to lucrative illegal activities such as drug smuggling and trafficking of people and weapons across the Egyptian-Israeli border, particularly within northern Sinai while militants from Gaza made use of the rugged and isolated desert terrain to launch attacks on Israel.

Under President Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), Sadat-era policies continued, leaving Sinai disaffected. Smuggling thrived in Gaza as did insecurity. The relationship between the Egyptian government and the Bedouins remained tenuous; Sinai did not receive sufficient investment or resources for education, health and transportation. During the January 2011 revolution, the Bedouin avidly supported toppling the Mubarak regime, and were active participants in Sinai, attacking security checkpoints and police stations, chasing officers out of the region, and appropriating remaining weapons. Once the Mubarak regime collapsed, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) focused on maintaining control over the Egyptian mainland and the ensuing democratic transition, with little to no attention paid to the Sinai Peninsula. During the eighteen months between the revolution and the

Continued on page 8
Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) foreign relations official Bekkai Boualem was killed in an army ambush on 12 October, reports the Associated Press (AP). However, despite Algeria’s willingness to eliminate terrorism in the region, it still refuses to participate in a military intervention in northern Mali, the birthplace of AQIM, on the basis that such intervention may further jeopardise regional security. Algeria supported the United Nations Security Council resolution of 12 October, requesting a Mali intervention plan from African regional groups and the United Nations (UN) within 45 days, but also encourages Mali to hold talks with Tuareg rebels on the condition that the group severs its ties to the Islamic terror groups, including AQIM and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA). Moreover, Algerian Maghreb and African Affairs Minister Abdelkader Messahel met with Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz at Nouakchott in order to coordinate their stance regarding northern Mali, informs Magharebia. Both officials confirmed their support for the fight against terrorism in the region, but indicated their preference for a political solution to the Mali crisis, involving both the Malian government and secessionist movements.

Algerian police are clearing the streets of illegal vendors in Algiers as a sign of state confidence that the “Arab Spring context” has passed, reports Reuters. According to Algiers police chief Serir Mohamed, the danger of a popular uprising similar to the one in Tunisia when a street vendor burnt himself to death, is now low, allowing the police to enforce the law on the streets once again. Mohamed said that “it is the government’s job to tackle unemployment”. Unemployment amongst youth in Algeria, where over a third of the population is under the age of thirty, is thought to be much higher than the official unemployment rate of ten percent.

Algeria will contribute USD five billion to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), reports AP, which will place it as an “intermediate” level contributor. The Ministry of Finance stated that joining the IMF “contributes positively to the country’s image in the international community”. In other economic news, Algeria will become the third largest energy sector, investor among nineteen energy producing countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region investing USD 71 billion over the next five years, according to Bloomberg. With a USD 165 billion investment, Saudi Arabia ranks first, and United Arab Emirates follows with USD 107 billion. Algerian investment will put it ahead of countries such as Iran, Iraq and Qatar.

Libya

The Islamist Militia group Ansar al Sharia, suspected of orchestrating the attacks against the US Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, has fled to the Green Mountains, reports the Guardian. About 150 to 200 militiamen with 17 vehicles are blockaded in the region by Libyan forces; however, army commanders say that they lack the firepower and other necessary equipment to further pursue the militants. In other security news, unknown attackers attempted to kill police colonel Mohammed Ben Haleem in Benghazi on 13 October, informs the Tripoli Post. A home-made bomb was placed under the officer’s car outside his house according to police spokesman Majed al-Obedi. However, Ben Haleem’s life was spared as he had returned to his house to retrieve something when the bomb detonated. The incident was the latest in a chain of attacks against police and army officials in Libya.

Libya is locked in a stalemate with various militia groups, which have provided public services such as policing and patrolling of borders since the ousting of Moammar Gaddafi, but are now refusing to submit to government control, reports the New York Times. The government has come under public pressure to curtail the militias’ power following the killing of US Ambassador Chris Stevens, but has been unsuccessful. The government’s reliance on the militias for national security makes it harder to exert control over them, “trapping Libya in a state of lawlessness”.

Libya’s lawyers, during a hearing in The Hague on 09 October, argued that Libya has sufficient evidence to charge Saif al-Islam, the son of former Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi with crimes against humanity, while the disagreement between the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Libya over where he should be tried continues, reports Agence France-Presse (AFP). According to ICC defence lawyers, a fair trial for Saif al-Islam would not be possible in Libya where he may face the death penalty. According to Libya’s lawyer Philippe Sands, evidence against Saif al-Islam includes a call to security officials to use violence shortly after the start of uprisings in February 2011. He is also accused of ordering the use of live rounds against protesters and recruiting Pakistani mercenaries.

Libya elected Ali Zidan, a former independent member of the General National Congress and a human rights lawyer, as the new interim prime minister, reports AP. The election took place a week after the dismissal of Mustafa Abushagur upon receiving a vote of no confidence for his cabinet proposal. Zidan’s top priority will be to present a new government line-up acceptable to the national congress.

16 October 2012
Morocco

Members of a Moroccan drug smuggling network were arrested in France and Switzerland on 10 October, informs Reuters. The network smuggled cannabis from Morocco to Europe via Spain. The drugs were then sold in France and the money was laundered in Switzerland. Swiss authorities seized cash and valuables worth about USD 3.2 million, while French authorities captured over a million euros in cash, two art pieces worth USD 1.29 million, two hand guns and six gold ingots. According to investigators, the network handled USD 15.48 million since May 2012.

A boat carrying seventeen sub-Saharan illegal immigrants capsized off the northern coast of Morocco on 09 October, informs AFP. The incident happened about a kilometre away from the Spanish enclave of Melilla. Five people, including a child and three women, remain unaccounted for and thought to have drowned. In other humanitarian news, Reuters reports that there has been a significant increase in the number of abandoned children in Morocco. A study by Insaf, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) supporting women and children in distress, estimates that 27,200 babies were born outside of marriage in 2009, of which 8,760 were abandoned. According to Omar Kindi, president of Insaf, these numbers are “getting much worse”. Outdated laws and society’s views on extramarital affairs are the root cause of the problem, according to the NGO.

Several Algerian NGOs called for action with regard to the situation in Western Sahara during a UN meeting on 11 October, informs Sahara Press Service. Said Ayachi, vice president of the Algerian Committee for Solidarity with the Saharawi People, told the United Nations Special Political and Decolonization Committee that “violations are committed by Moroccan security forces who have created a climate of fear, fuelled by arbitrary executions, torture, enforced disappearances, rape of women and destruction of property”. He also emphasised that Western Sahara is largely isolated from the rest of the world by Moroccan authorities, and NGOs, international observers and media are rarely granted access to the region.

Moroccan King Mohammed VI will visit the Gulf monarchies of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, according to Kuwait’s Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Khaled al-Jarallah, reports Reuters. The king is expected to discuss bilateral relations and investment opportunities as the Moroccan economy, which is highly connected to the European economy, is heavily impacted by the euro crisis.

Tunisia

The editor-in-chief of the Tunisian children’s magazine Qawz Quzah apologised for publishing a section featuring detailed instructions on how to make a Molotov cocktail, reports NBC News. Monji Chebbi apologised on television for the incident he described as “professional mistake”. The government announced that the magazine will be prosecuted. In related news, a video of Tunisian children reciting a song praising Osama Bin Laden and terrorism was recently brought to the attention of Western media by the Middle East media watchdog Memri.org, reports the Examiner. The video, initially recorded in June 2012, illustrates that while such acts were once considered “unthinkable” during the former secular Tunisian government, they are now occurring with increasing frequency.

Ursula Schulze-Aboubacar, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative in Tunisia, issued a statement calling for the support of Tunisian authorities in closing the Shousha refugee camp by June 2013, reports Tunisia Live. Located near the Libyan border, the Shousha camp was established following the outbreak of violence in Libya and hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees at the height of the unrest. The camp currently hosts 2,124 refugees, including many from several East African, sub-Saharan Africa, and Middle Eastern states. Nabil Ben Bekhti, protection officer of the UNHCR Tunis office, said that closing Shousha camp will allow UNHCR to prioritise other emergency aid zones.

Source: New Internationalist
Egypt

President Mohammed Morsi attempted to remove Egypt’s top public prosecutor on 11 October after the acquittal of all 24 defendants in the “Battle of the Camel” case, including several senior officials from the former regime, reports BusinessWeek. The men were charged with the deaths of protesters in the notorious incident on 02 February 2011, during which pro-Mubarak forces, some riding on camelback, launched an assault on peaceful protests in Tahrir Square. Chief prosecutor Abdel-Meguid Mahmoud was reappointed as ambassador to the Vatican by President Morsi; however, Mahmoud remained defiant, refusing to give up his post, informs Al Jazeera. President Morsi subsequently backed down two days later, agreeing Mahmoud could stay in his position, reports BBC. Meanwhile, protests held in Cairo’s Tahrir Square on 12 October following the acquittals in the Battle of the Camel case, turned violent when clashes broke out between opponents and supporters of President Morsi, injuring at least 110 people, informs Reuters. Many of the protesters expressed frustration at the court’s ruling, while others already had planned to protest over they called Morsi’s failure to deliver on campaign promises during his first 100 days in office.

The Constituent Assembly released a partial first draft of the new Egyptian constitution on 10 October, reports Egypt Independent. Egyptians will now have the opportunity to voice their opinions on the draft vis-à-vis community dialogues. Head of the Rights and Freedoms Committee Edward Ghaleb stated that the assembly had incorporated input from many sources, and that fundamental freedoms, including freedom of the press, freedom of belief, exchange of information and the rights of housing and health were not impinged upon in any way, but reiterated that it is the responsibility of the legal bodies to enforce them. The draft also imposes limits on executive power, but sections that have remained a source of disagreement amongst assembly members have thus far been omitted, reports Voice of America News (VOA News). While it outlines a division in power between the president, prime minister and parliament and maintains a pledge to Islam as the foundation of Egyptian legislation, the draft does not outline which government office would oversee the military. Furthermore, VOA News reports that the draft includes the controversial clause stating that equality between men and women should be limited in accordance with Islamic law or sharia. The assembly will finalise the constitution and hold a public referendum by the end of the year.

The Ministry of the Interior will grant citizenship to all Palestinians born of an Egyptian mother, reports the Jerusalem Post. Approximately 50,000 Palestinians recently received Egyptian citizenship and another 35,000 Palestinians may be eligible; the government estimates the number could rise to 100,000 by next year. Under former President Hosni Mubarak, Egypt refused to grant citizenship to Palestinians despite a 1965 Arab League resolution stipulating that Palestinians should be granted official travel documents in whichever Arab country they reside.

The head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Christian Lagarde, stated on 11 October that a loan deal with Egypt could be reached by the middle of November, reports Ahram Online. Lagarde, addressing the IMF and the World Bank at a semi-annual meeting in Tokyo, said she was feeling very confident that the USD 4.8 billion loan to Egypt was imminent. On 09 October, the IMF forecasted positive growth of two percent in 2012 for the Egyptian economy, higher than original forecasts.

The Nadim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims published a report citing over 200 cases of police brutality during President Morsi’s first 100 days in office, including 88 cases of torture, 34 deaths and 7 cases of sexual assault, reports Ahram Online. The report indicates that the 34 deaths occurred in police stations, prisons and public areas, many resulting from live ammunition used to break up protests. Since the 2011 revolution, there have been repeated calls for reform of Egypt’s security forces and an end to the use of torture, which was also common during the former regime of President Mubarak.

South Sudan

South Sudan warns they may ban the registration of the opposition party Sudan People’s Liberation Movement for Democratic Change (SPLM-DC) over allegations that it is supporting armed dissidents in their fight against the government, reports the Sudan Tribune. The SPLM-DC denies all allegations. In other governance news, the first 100 officers, including 9 women, of the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS) diplomatic protection unit graduated during the week of 09 October. Under continued guidance by the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the officers will be responsible for securing the safety of embassies, international non-governmental organizations, and UN agencies.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) reported that the SSNPS released two Quarterly Crimes Statistics reports on 09 October, detailing crime rates, trends and analysis for the last two quarters. According to UNDP, the “availability of reliable and relevant statistics is essential for planning the deployment of scarce resources within the criminal justice system”. South Sudan began collecting data on crime at the state and county levels in December 2011 and there is the only reliable source of national crime statistics.
The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that in order for South Sudan to unlock its economic potential, the country needs a lasting peace with Sudan in addition to overcoming such challenges as weak state institutions, a lack of infrastructure and a weak human capital base, reports Reuters. According to the IMF, South Sudan has economic potential due to its oil, livestock, fishery, agriculture and forestry reserves. The IMF predicts that South Sudan’s gross domestic product (GDP) will fall by 55 percent in 2012 as a result of an oil shutdown starting in January, but expects GDP to grow by 69.9 percent in 2013 when oil exports resume. The country’s inflation rate was at 42.9 percent in September. In their first high-profile appearance together since signing a critical trade and border agreement last month, South Sudan and Sudan attended an investment conference hosted by Austria, reports Reuters. In an effort to gain more foreign investment, the two countries pledged to work together to rebuild their economies and maintain peace.

Sudan

Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) rebels said that they shelled South Kordofan’s capital, Kadugli on 10 October, reports Reuters. This is the second attack on the capital following an earlier attack on 08 October that killed seven. The rebels claim that they were acting in self-defence against attacks by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). During the attack, a rebel shell landed in the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) compound but failed to explode. The UN condemned the attack, calling it an indiscriminate and reprehensible act, reports Agence France-Press (AFP). The attacks coincided with talks held in Kadugli between the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and others about how to end the war in in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. The SPLM-N denied that the attacks were aimed at disrupting the peace conference. A diplomatic source informed AFP that the shelling may have been an attempt to show strength as well as displeasure with the recent agreement between South Sudan and Sudan to establish a demilitarised border buffer zone to cut support for the SPLM-N. Sudan’s ruling NCP turned down a proposition made by South Sudan President Salva Kiir to facilitate a settlement with the rebel SPLM-N. The Sudanese government calls for the SPLM-N to disarm before talks begin.

In a statement released in Khartoum on 09 October, the partners of a tripartite initiative developed by the UN, AU and Arab League stated that they “prepared an Action Plan for needs assessment and distribution of humanitarian aid to war-affected civilians in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile states”. The partners said that there must be a “commitment toward a cease-fire and a cessation of hostilities from both sides” and that the recent mortar attacks in Kadugli “could adversely affect the chances of activating the Tripartite Initiative on the ground and with the desired speed”. The relief operation was due to start in August but was delayed by the lack of data on the number of civilians and their locations. Relief workers have been unable to access SPLM-N controlled areas of the two states which resulted in food insecurity and a humanitarian crisis. Every day, 100 refugees arrive in Yida refugee camp in South Sudan’s Unity state, fleeing violence and food shortages in South Kordofan, reports the United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Currently, Yida camp houses 63,000 refugees and the number is expected to rise as the rains abate and the roads re-open in the coming months.

Sudanese authorities report that they have arrested suspects involved in the killing of four UN peacekeepers last week in Darfur. The acting head of the regional peacekeeping force, Aichatou Mindaoudou, reports that parts of Darfur have seen a rise in violence with high civilian casualties, according to AFP. She further stated that there continues to be a “huge challenge” in implementing a peace deal between Sudan’s government and Darfur rebel groups.

In its semi-annual World Economic Outlook report, the IMF lowered the outlook for the Sudanese economy from a -7.3 percent GDP contraction to 11.2 percent, reports the Sudan Tribune. Sudan’s classification from an oil exporter changed to that of an oil importer following the secession of the oil-producing South last year. In an effort to offset economic damage from lost oil income, Sudan will start exporting refined gold for the first time in mid-October, reports Reuters. Sudan aims to sell up to USD 3 billion in gold this year, double last year’s gold revenue.

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Ethiopia
The Ethiopian government released 75 Eritrean prisoners of war (POWs) who were captured by Ethiopian troops during a border skirmish in March 2011 in retaliation for the killing of five tourists in the country’s Afar region, reports Sudan Tribune. The Ethiopian Administration for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA), in coordination with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), arranged for the POWs to be taken to the Eritrean border after offering them three options: voluntary repatriation, remaining in Ethiopia or resettlement to a third country.

Ethiopia awarded a two-year, USD 1.3 billion contract to two Chinese telecom companies which will upgrade the country’s telecommunication infrastructure, reports the Africa Report. ZTE, a company partly owned by the Chinese government, and Huawei Technologies will implement the project which is expected to double the number of mobile phone users to 40 million by 2015. The country currently has approximately eighteen million mobile phones users and a population of over eighty million. In other economic news, Ethiopians are becoming increasingly frustrated with what has been termed “meddling” by Egypt and Sudan in the country’s planned Renaissance Dam project on the Blue Nile River, reports Bikya Masr. The dam, which would be the largest of its kind on the African continent, has been blocked by Egypt and Sudan, which are located downstream from the proposed dam site. An International Panel of Experts, (IPoE) consisting of expert representatives from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan, in addition to four other international experts, visited Ethiopia last week to study the impact of the dam along the river. The IPoE will release its findings and recommendations concerning the project to the three governments within nine months.

The United Nations (UN) has urged Ethiopia to eliminate child marriage, reports New Business Ethiopia. The UN and Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs issued a joint statement on 11 October, marking the first ever International Day of the Girl Child, calling for an end to marriage for anyone under the age of eighteen. Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world; the 2011 Demographic and Health Survey estimated that 63 percent of women are married by their eighteenth birthday. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), child marriage is a violation of rights which impacts every aspect of a young girl’s life. While the legal age for marriage in the country is eighteen, local customs have made early marriage a popular practice. The UN warned child marriage is a harmful traditional practice which denies a girl of her childhood and her education, as well as limiting her opportunities, and increasing her risk to violence and abuse.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) will conduct a three-day training for Ethiopian Diaspora coordination officials starting 15 October, reports Bikya Masr. The training will develop the capacities of government officials to utilise the returning Ethiopian diaspora for development in the country. The government is currently drafting legislation to make it easier for members of the diaspora to return to Ethiopia from abroad, reports Voice of America. Large numbers of the Ethiopian diaspora continue to return to the country, positively impacting the national economy which is one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Kenya
Police believe a Kenyan official was killed in retaliation for the earlier arrest of a secessionist leader in Kwale, Coast province, reports BBC. The official’s murder comes following the arrest of a member of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) for a gunfight at his home which killed two people. The violence comes as fears continue to rise in the lead up to general elections scheduled for March 2013. Over the past three months, at least 100 people have been killed in ethnic clashes in the south-east Tana River area, also believed to be related to the upcoming elections. The MRC has accused the government of marginalising ethnic groups based in the coastal region, which is also the centre of the country’s tourism sector.

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki vetoed bonuses for legislators which had been approved in parliament last week, informs the Washington Post. Legislators awarded themselves up to USD 110,000 in bonuses, which the President deemed unconstitutional and untenable given the country’s current economic climate. The country’s legislators receive a salary of about USD 120,000 annually, compared to the average Kenyan, who earns approximately USD 5 per day. Kibaki reminded parliament that the country had recently increased salaries for teachers and doctors. In addition, the new Kenyan constitution demands significant resources for implementation, as well as the current struggle
to meet other demands in the economy. The bonuses also sparked public outrage, with approximately 100 people protesting outside of the parliament on 09 October.

More than 240 girls, some under ten years of age, filed a petition with the High Court in Nairobi on 11 October, accusing police of asking for bribes to investigate cases of rape, refusing to record rapes unless the victims had witnesses, and for making claims that victims had consented to the rapes, reports Reuters. According to a 2008/2009 government survey, one in five girls and women experience sexual violence in Kenya; however, rape cases are rarely reported due to extreme public stigma and distrust of the police and the legal system. Despite the existence of robust legislation protecting children from sexual assault, the law is rarely enforced by Kenyan police.

Somalia
The Somali National Army (SNA) reported a massive build-up of Ethiopian troops in Gedo province, Somalia, on 11 October, reports Shabelle News. The troops have constructed bases in preparation for a major military offensive against al Shabaab militants in towns and locations still under their control. Tensions remain high and civilians remain on high alert for potential hostilities. The SNA arrested 364 suspected al Shabaab militants in Mogadishu on 10 October, informs Garowe Online. This was the largest mass arrest in months within Mogadishu, which mainly targeted young men linked to the Islamic militant organisation. Subsequently, 304 of the detainees were immediately released; however, sixty remain in custody pending criminal investigations. The SNA seized 36 explosive devices in conjunction with the arrests. Chief of Police Col. Ahmed Ma’alin stated that the security crack-down will continue within Mogadishu, targeting suspects associated with al Shabaab.

The port city of Kismayo was hit by two explosions on 10 October, reports Garowe Online. The first explosion, a grenade, did not cause any casualties. However, the second explosion, believed to be an improvised explosive device (IED) reportedly killed one civilian and injured at least two others. The attacks appeared to target Somali forces as they travelled through the city centre; however, none were injured in the blast, and no one has claimed responsibility for the attacks. Kismayo, once an al Shabaab stronghold, is now under the control of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops and remains under curfew. It was reported that members of the militant group fled the city upon the troops’ arrival. Another roadside bomb targeting security forces exploded on 14 October, as a military vehicle carrying Somali soldiers passed through the town of Shalanbod, reports All Africa. The town, which strategically links Mogadishu to the south and south-western regions of the country, was recently recaptured by AMISOM and Somali government troops. Unconfirmed reports by witnesses indicate that soldiers were killed in the blast. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Somalia’s deputy energy minister, Abdullahi Dool, says Somalia will honour all oil contracts, including those signed prior to 1991 with such oil majors as Royal Dutch Shell, BP and Chevron, reports Reuters. Investors have voiced concerns that previous deals could be nullified by the new government of a country that recently elected a new president for the first time in twenty years. However, the new government has yet to resolve a number of exploration licences which granted multiple companies the right to explore in overlapping areas. Dool stated that the issue will be decided once the new Somali cabinet takes office on 06 November.
inauguration of the new President Mohammed Morsi on 30 June 2012, Sinai became increasingly lawless. The Sinai is now considered “the new hotspot in the Arab-Israeli conflict” and the instability in the region could threaten to upset the peace between Egypt and Israel, according to the Washington Institute.

The government’s attention was redirected to Sinai following an incident in August 2011, when militants attacked a police station and a bank in the town of al-Arish, killing several policemen and soldiers. An Egyptian court subsequently convicted fourteen men for the attacks as part of the Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad illegal militant organisation. The SCAF, in response, coordinated and executed a security operation to address the Sinai’s lawlessness; however it was short-lived and did nothing to stop further infiltration by militants into the peninsula.

In 2012, nearly a year later, sixteen Sinai border guards were killed, prompting the new president to pledge that his administration would “impose full control” over Sinai. The attack was the deadliest on Egyptian security forces in the peninsula in decades, prompting the new government to launch “Operation Eagle”, a large scale military operation with the mission of clearing Sinai of the militant groups which had taken control of the area. Operation Eagle was significant in that the Egyptian used air power via air strikes and ground raids which had not been used in the Sinai since the 1973 war with Israel.

Militant attacks continue to occur on both sides of the Egyptian-Israeli border since the inception of Operation Eagle. Given the disenfranchisement of the Bedouin, it is likely that the Islamic militants have been able to successfully recruit sympathisers from the tribe in what has essentially been a security vacuum. Analysts now suspect that militants have broadened recruiting to outside of the Sinai to include militants with links to al Qaeda. Israeli intelligence asserts that a solitary network of Islamic militants with links to al Qaeda have been the source of most of the recent attacks from the Sinai. Israeli intelligence now views Sinai “as the home of an independent jihadist network”, reports the Long War Journal.

Furthermore, there are indications that militant Islamists are recruiting in the Nile Delta, as suggested by a recent cross-border raid into Israel that resulted in the deaths of two attackers from the Nile Delta. Analysts assert that extreme Islamic militancy is now commonplace in Sinai with militants recruiting young, unemployed men. Given the lax security situation, this trend is one that is expected to continue. According to al Arabiya News, the situation in Sinai has continued to worsen as Islamic militant groups are increasingly becoming better armed than their Egyptian opponents. Such acquisitions include substantial weapon arsenals of anti-aircraft missiles and tanks most likely smuggled in from Libya. The militant groups are resorting to guerrilla warfare amidst the backdrop of the mountainous desert terrain; becoming more confident and bolder with each attack on security forces on both sides of the Egyptian-Israeli border.

The insecurity caused by Islamic militants is becoming an “ideological challenge” reports Reuters. While heavily contained under the previous administration, Morsi must balance allowing religious freedom and preventing the growing militancy. As a result, the President’s political will to support Operation Eagle seems to be flagging. For example, on a visit to Sinai on 05 October, Morsi pledged to ease up on the crackdown in the peninsula, inferring that he would not pursue hundreds of fugitives in Sinai. During Morsi’s meeting with ultraconservative Salafi clerics and tribal leaders, the president guaranteed that “sons of Sinai” would not be pursued and the judiciary would review many of the cases of those tried in absentia. Since taking office early this year, President Morsi has authorised the release of dozens of Islamic militant leaders sentenced to life imprisonment or given death sentences on terrorism-related charges.

In response to the growing Sinai insecurity, the Israeli government recently issued a security warning on Sinai, indicating that further attacks by militant groups are imminent, and Israel appears to be escalating intelligence operations in southern Gaza, where Jihadist groups are thought to be operational. Egyptian military officials say that the on-going security operation in Sinai requires better military hardware – something which may make Israel uncomfortable. An Egyptian military source indicates that the current security operation “is progressing well, but we’re trying to clean up a mess that has been ignored for at least ten years. It’s a job that requires time and effort, especially that we’re being very careful to avoid collateral damage.” The Israeli government, while concerned and monitoring the situation closely, have indicated they will not consider renegotiating Camp David, to allow Egypt to substantially increase their military footprint in Sinai. As such, the overall impact of the Sinai operation remains questionable. While Egyptian authorities report significant progress, some Cairo-based diplomats advise it is still premature to believe that Sinai-based militant networks have been contained.

Continued from page 1