EGYPT

The rising threat of the Islamic State – Wilayat Sinai in Egypt, the strain of the global health crisis, and growing domestic unrest over the pandemic response leaves Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in a vulnerable position.

His solution: silencing news of militant attacks and pushing through new amendments to tighten his grip on power.

The recent IS attack on electricity towers in Sinai resulted in a major power outage that disrupted water pumping infrastructure, leading to heightened fears among residents requiring water for preventative measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Violence involving IS has been on the rise in Egypt since early last month; attacks by the group often increase during Ramadan.

Reported fatalities stemming from these events have also been increasing [seen in the graph].

Following the attack on the towers, Egyptian authorities prohibited the media from publishing any news of the incident (though the state denies these claims). Details of the attack would suggest that the government is vulnerable to the growing security threat in Sinai. Such exposure, at a time when the state is already spread thin combating both the pandemic and popular discontent with its management of the crisis, could threaten the president’s hold on power.

Al-Sisi has moved to shore up his position, ratifying new amendments to the country's emergency law last week, which grant him additional sweeping authorities. While the government says the measures are meant to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, the majority of the amendments are not clearly tied to public health issues.

These new powers include giving Al-Sisi the authority to ban or limit public gatherings, even outside of public health emergencies.

Demonstrations in Egypt were at a high until early April [seen in the graph], when parliament first passed the bill proposing the new amendments. This was weeks before Al-Sisi formally ratified the bill, suggesting that the bill has already begun to be enforced.