

Jihad in Sinai Peninsula

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاونٹر ٹیرورزم

Egypt's Sinai Peninsula has been an important trade and migration point for centuries. Egypt, which has an important place both in the history of the Jews and in the history of the Muslims, and has surely existed as a great kingdom for thousands of years before these religions.

Egypt is an important country in the Muslim world, which was conquered by Muslims centuries after the Jews established the Kingdom of Israel. With the establishment of the modern state of Israel, tensions and wars occurred between Muslim Arabs and Israeli Jews.

The Sinai Peninsula took its share from this tension and witnessed great conflicts in modern times. The peninsula, which was under Israeli control for a period, was left for Egypt again.

The majority belief in the peninsula was Islamic Sufism until Hosni Mubarak was toppled. With the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the state authority began to disappear in the peninsula, which is almost entirely desert.

Its predecessor ideology began to spread on the peninsula. The Bedouins in the desert began to rebel where there was no state authority. The predecessor organizations, led by al-Qaeda, began to launch attacks in the Arab Gas Pipeline area. The natural gas in the region emerges from the vicinity of Arish and is exported to countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Israel.

Al Qaeda's war strategy was about to undermine the Egyptian economy by harming this line. In August 2011, Operation Eagle, the anti-terrorist operation, was limitedly successful, but could not digest al-Qaeda militants.

Within a year, attacks on the Egyptian Army continued. For this reason, the Egyptian Army launched the Sinai Operation in August 2012. Jihadists who established tunnel connections with the Gaza Strip were also disturbing Israel. In addition, since the security of the Suez Canal was in danger, the Sinai Operation became inevitable.

However, because the desert area was very large, there was still no productive operation. Approximately 32 militants were neutralized and 38 militants were arrested. After the coup against Mohammed Morsi in 2013, the arrival of Sisi, who has good relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia, became a milestone in Sinai.

Attacks against the Egyptian Army have increased more than ever. Nowadays we understand why al-Qaeda's "unofficial ally" al-Nusra, mourned the death of Muhammad Morsi. Following the developments in the region, Sisi sought to maintain its authority by increasing the number of arrests.

The Sisi regime, which was successful in the first place in arrests in the region and in increasing security measures, would have to face an unexpected development. Some of the al-Qaeda militants of that period took refuge in the Jabal Halal region, while others declared loyalty to ISIS.

In those years, ISIS, which dominated the majority of Iraq and Syria and declared the caliphate, was prepared to declare a province in Sinai. Therefore, 2014 was a milestone for the region. Local fighters like Abu Osama El Masri, Shadi al-Manaei and Selim Suleiman Al-Haram stripped to the leadership of the organization and expanded their actions.

In 2015, violence began to escalate in the Sinai Peninsula. ISIS's Sinai province kidnapped soldiers from the Egyptian Army and began to execute them and release the videos. The Egyptian Army continued its operations intensively in the region. ISIS's attack patterns were similar to those in Iraq. Handmade explosives formed the basis of the attacks. Fake checkpoints and kidnappings were also frequently set up. In addition, members of the Al Tarabin tribe worked with the Sisi government. The government convinced them to fight against ISIS.

Operation Martyr's Right is the largest operation of the Egyptian Army in the region over the years. In the areas around Rafah, Arish, Sheyh Zuweyd, it was announced that approximately 500 militants were neutralized in operations carried out with air support. However, despite all these operations, ISIS members unexpectedly carried out a bomb attack on the passenger plane from Egypt to Russia which resulted 224 civilian casualties in the attack. The ISIS announced that the attack took place because of Russia's involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Until 2016, the attacks stalled. In the first weeks of the new year, attacks started to increase again. Following the attacks of the organization in March and April, the Egyptian Army conducted an operation in the Jabal Halal region in May and 88 militants were declared ineffective.

The region's leader, Abu Duaa al-Ansari, was neutralized in the summer of 2016 as a result of the air strikes. Although attacks and operations continued until 2017, they were not very large. Despite the loss of its regional leader, ISIS is in the process of being reorganized.

In April 2017, for the first time in many years in Egypt, Christian minorities were directly targeted and around 40 Egyptian citizens lost their lives in attacks on churches. During this period, the intensity of the attacks increased as well as their diversification. Attacks with bomb-loaded trucks and assassinations in the city center were carried out. The Egyptian Army responded with air strikes.

In the same year, the Sufis were again chosen as a different target group, and a Sufi mosque was attacked with suicide bombers. 2017 was also a critical year for the Israeli-ISIS war. After the Israeli Air Force provided intelligence information to the Egyptian Army, ISIS hit the Israeli-bound Eskhol region with rockets.

In 2018, it is known that Israel carried out air operations in the region. 2018 was relatively quiet for Sinai Peninsula. Former terrorist attacks and anti-terrorist operations continue today. However, it is possible to say that there are not as many violent conflicts as were in the previous years.

Civilian settlements destroyed by the order of Sisi attract people's reactions and increase sympathy for the organization. It is correct to say that this sympathy is a sociological result. Sisi needs to reconsider its policy on this issue. I do not think there will be any major development in the region soon.

If the organization seizes ATGM-type weapons, there is a possibility that the course of the war will change because such attacks can be very effective, especially in large open areas such as the desert. We have witnessed this in the war in the Homs Desert (Syria) in the past. We will soon see what the upcoming days bring for the region.

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