

SINAI: FROM THE HOLY LAND TO THE HOLY WAR (ROOTS OF TERROR IN THE SINAI PENINSULA)

SÍNAI: A SZENT FÖLDTŐL A SZENT HÁBORÚIG

The Sinai peninsula, the corridor between Africa and Asia is a tourist paradise. But this paradise not the same, as it was before 2004, when the first, but not the least terrorist attack happened. When I saw the page of wikitravel about Sudan on the net in 2010, and now, I read „:Warning!”¹ written with big red letters, When I saw the page of wikitravel about Egypt.² and the Sinai³ on the net in 2010, I didn't see the „Warning!” notification. But now I have read it written with big red letters.⁴

LOCATION OF THE SINAI

The Arab Republic of Egypt is a country located on two continents: in the northeast of Africa and in the southwest of Asia. The link between the two continents is the Sinai Peninsula. From the total area of Egypt (1.001 450 km²), the Sinai is around 6% (61 000 km²). The borders of the triangular peninsula are the Mediterranean Sea in the north, the Gulf of Suez in the southwest, the Gulf of Aqaba in the southeast, the Suez Canal in the west, and the Gaza Strip and Israel in the east.

Presidential Decree No. 84., issued in 1979, divided the peninsula into two governorates: North and South Sinai Governorates (*muhafaza*).⁵ The territory of the North Sinai Governorate is 27 564 km² ⁶, and that of the southern governorate is 28 438 km² ⁷. In the western part of the Sinai three other *muhafaza* (Ismailijja, Suez and Port Said) straddle the canal, with the bulk of their territory in Africa.

The Sinai is an underdeveloped desert area, but it is very important geo-strategically.

The Sinai is sparsely populated. The mountains, the desert, and the abandoned mines are ideal places for the terrorist groups. After a road attack or kidnapping, the terrorist can easily escape by their cars, and abscond.

North Sinai is one of the poorest governorates in Egypt, but the southern neighbor's is well developed, due to the prosperous investments in tourism. All of the biggest, and the most important cities of the peninsula are located in the southern governorate.

In 1994, the Egyptian government planned the development of the Sinai, but in 1997 the government gave up this project, changed its opinion, and started to accomplish the Toshka Project, the creation of the second Nile Valley in Southern Egypt.⁸

The governor of the North Sinai, Abdel Wahab Mabrouk was dismissed⁹ following a raid (8 August 2012.) that left 16 Egyptian soldiers dead.¹⁰

¹ <http://wikitravel.org/en/Sudan>

² <http://wikitravel.org/en/Egypt>

³ http://wikitravel.org/en/Sinai_Peninsula

⁴ <http://wikitravel.org/en/Sudan>

⁵ <http://www.northsinai.gov.eg>

⁶ <http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

⁷ http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/محافظة_مدِينة_جنوب

⁸ Toshka Project - Mubarak Pumping Station /, Egypt <http://www.water-technology.net/projects/mubarak/>;

⁹ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/defense-ministry-will-choose-north-sinai-governor-says-minister>

In September 2012 the new, elected President of Egypt, Mohamed Mursi appointed ten new governors and one out of these is for the North Sinai Governorate.¹¹

The governor (*muhafez*) of the southern governorate, Brigadier Khaled Foda used to be the governor of the Luxor governorate, where on 17 November 1997, six Islamist terrorist¹² killed 62 tourists at the temple of Hatsepsut.

During Egypt's 5000-year history, from the beginning to the present, possession of the peninsula has always been very important for Egypt, for the following reasons:

- mineral resources;¹³
- the peninsula is a natural border protecting from any attack or invasion from the North;¹⁴
- the large and arid desert of Sinai assures a natural defense for the Suez Canal,¹⁵
- the possession of the peninsula guarantees military domination over the Red Sea.¹⁶

At-Tur is the capital of the South Sinai Governorate, but the largest and the most important city is Sarm es-Seikh. At-Tur is an old, biblical city, and famous tourist destination. There is the Rutho Monastery,¹⁷ which is on the list of UNESCO¹⁸.

The modern city of al-Arish, near the Israeli border, is the capital of the north, where the population is not only Arabian but also Palestinian.

And there are two other important cities: Sarm es-Sejkh, a tourist destination, where there is one camp from two of the MOF¹⁹ The main MFO's camp is in el-Ghora²⁰. El-Ghora is the „capital” of the MOF. In 1982 the last Israeli soldier left Sinai, and the contingents of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) assumed control of it. The MFO – for reasons of military efficiency and law enforcement – divided the region into three main sections in Egypt and later on in Israel.

(North part) and Sarm es-Sejkh in the South. After this the mission of MFO.^{21,22} started.

But in the peninsula, there is one other division, not recorded, and officially not recognized: the borders of the Bedouin tribal areas, marked by stones, trees, and *wadis*.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SINAI

The history of Sinai is well known from historical and archaeological research.²³ Though the most famous events are Moses meeting God on Mount Sinai, and the Exodus, to determine the exact date of it is very difficult. The name of Israel is first mentioned on the stele of Mernepta.²⁴, so the Exodus happened before the reign of Meneptah.

<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/09/04/morsy-appoints-ten-new-governors/>

¹² Gamaa Islamiyya

¹³ Turquoise, malachite, copper and oil

¹⁴ Hyksos, Assyrian, Turkish, British, or Israeli

¹⁵ Opened in 1869.

¹⁶ Arabian peninsula: Mecca and Medina, Yemen, Sudan

¹⁷ Built in the 6. century by Byzantine emperor Justinian.

¹⁸ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/194/>

¹⁹ Multinational Force and Observers

²⁰ Approximately 16-25 kilometers from the international Egyptian-Israeli border. (25 km: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/el-gorah.htm>; u.l.:2013.04.11.) and 16 km Egypt restores order at MFO's Sinai HQ after Friday night attack; <http://www.timesofisrael.com/egyptian-military-regains-control-of-northern-sinai/> (u.l.:2013.04.10.)

²¹ „An independent international organization, with peacekeeping responsibilities in the Sinai.” (<http://mfo.org>)

²² The origins of the MFO lie in Annex I to the 1979 Treaty of Peace between Egypt and Israel. In 1981, the Treaty Parties negotiated a Protocol that established the MFO and defined its mission.

²³ The first ruins are nine stonetombs, from B.C. 4000-3100.

²⁴ The most reliable source is a stele of pharao Meneptah (reigned 1212-1203 BC), which mentions that he destroyed the people of Israel.

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From the time of the Fatimids (909-1171) Egypt became the center of an empire of Asia and Africa, including the peninsula. From the Sinai and the Red Sea, Egypt could conquer Mecca, Medina²⁵, Yemen, and Syria-Palestine.

During the Crusades, when Egypt was under the control of the Fatimids, the Ayyubids and the Mamluks,²⁶ the importance of the peninsula was growing. Many fortresses and castles were built during those centuries.

The importance of the Sinai did not diminish under the Ottomans. The beduin inhabitants of the Sinai helped the Ottoman army in the conquest of Egypt. They show the wells, and the shortest roads to Cairo for the troops..

Even after the opening of the Suez Canal 1869, the peninsula was a part of the world politics.

Egypt and Israel have fought thrice (1956, 1967 and 1973) over this region.

During the Arab-Israeli wars in – 1948 and 1956 Egyptian and Israeli forces stormed across the peninsula, but between 1949 and 1967 the Sinai was under Egyptian military administration. In the Six Day War in the 1967 Israel occupied the Sinai and its occupation lasted till 1982.

In the presidency of Anwar as-Sadat, on 20 November 1977, the Egyptian President visited Israel and met Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. At that time a rapprochement began, which led to the Camp David Accords in 1978.

They discussed the future of the Sinai first time and also the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.²⁷ But in our days, the new prime minister after the fall of Mubarak, Essam Sharaf²⁸ told in an interview, that the „Camp David accords with Israel not a sacred thing”²⁹ „I am against normalisation of relations with Israel in any area, even in the area of scientific research.”³⁰

POPULATION

Out of the 380 500 persons which form the population of the Sinai; 314 000 ones live in the northern and 66 500 ones in the southern governorate, this latter is the least populated governorate in Egypt. About 60% of the population is of Bedouin origin. About 11-13 tribes live in the peninsula.³¹

The Egyptians moved to the Sinai to find jobs in the field of tourism.³² The largest minority is the Palestinians (50 000 - 70 000).³³ Most of the Bedouins in the north live in the towns, and have mingled with Egyptians and the people from neighboring Gaza. The Bedouins in the South Sinai Governorate maintain a traditional nomadic lifestyle.³⁴

In the era of President Mubarak (1981-2011) many hotels were built on the Red Sea coast, and cities grew up from the sand (Taba, Nuweiba, Dahab, Sarm es-Seykh). But the investors did not take into account the interests and traditions of the Bedouins, they occupied the Bedouin areas and "exiled" many tribes living on the coast into the interior of the peninsula.

"In the summer of 1999, the latest dispossession of land took place when the army bulldozed Bedouin-run tourist campgrounds north of Nuweiba as part of the final phase of hotel development in the sector, overseen by the Tourist Development Agency (TDA). The director of the Tourist Development Agency dismissed Bedouin rights in the most parts of the land, saying that they had not lived on the coast before 1982.”³⁵

²⁵ The two holiest islamic cities.

²⁶ Crusades: 1096-1272; Fatimids: 909-1171; Ayyubids: 1174-1250; Mamluks: 1250-1517

²⁷ The second was a framework agreement establishing the autonomy of the territory in the West Bank and Gaza.

²⁸ From 3 March 2011 to 21 November 2011

²⁹ Egypt declares Camp David accords with Israel 'not a sacred thing', <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8766724/Egypt-declares-Camp-David-accords-with-Israel-not-a-sacred-thing.html>

³⁰ Profile: Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharaf; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12668416>

³¹ <http://www.allsinai.info/sites/bedouines.htm>

³² <http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1>

³³ International Crisis Group, 1. oldal

³⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/01/us-egypt-sinai-idUSBRE83006120120401>

³⁵ <http://www.allsinai.info/sites/bedouines.htm>

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In the beginning of development of tourism, the Bedouins had played a serious role, but later they were driven out. According to statistics, only 30% are working in tourism now.³⁶

Therefore, for the people of Sinai the Egyptians are enemies. "We have known four periods of occupation (*ihtilal*), for the last 30 years namely British, Egyptian, and Israeli and later Egyptian again. Look, they are the colonialists of today there."³⁷ Bedouins were also barred from the military and the most part of the security services.

„The Egyptian officials working in the peninsula very often accused the Bedouins that in fact they are the "Sinai Jews." Thus they were expressing the mistrust in political allegiance of the Bedouins who had friendly relations to the Israelis, under whose control used to be the in this area from 1967 to 1982."³⁸

The local Palestinians have extensive contacts with the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip and the West Coast. The Bedouins do not recognize international borders. In fact, many of the northern Palestinian Bedouins are allied with those living outside the borders.

"A government report in 2010 said a quarter of all Sinai's population of some 600,000 people did not carry national ID cards. The Bedouins account for the majority of their number; still they are not allowed to have land of their own, or serve in the army and they do not benefit from any revenue from the local tourism."³⁹

"We don't feel like Egyptian citizens," said Sheikh Ahmed Hussein of the Qararsha tribe, one of the biggest in southern Sinai. "The Mubarak regime created this problem; intensified the problem of jihadist groups by not giving the people of Sinai their rights," stated Essam Durbella of Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya.⁴⁰

TERRORIST ATTACKS: 2004, 2005, 2006

The first extremist salafi Sheikh Soliman Abu Ayoub, appeared in the peninsula in 1986. He had close ties to the organization called Takfir va-l-Hijra.⁴¹

"All throughout, those groups have been peaceful. We could have done so much. We saw Israeli tourists coming and going before our eyes, but decided to be patient and far-sighted," Ayoub says.⁴²

On 7 October 2004 three bomb attacks targeted tourists in Taba and in other small tourist place.⁴³ After the massacre, the Israeli official media claimed that it was a terrorist attack against Israel, and its aim was to halt the Middle East peace process. But Egypt refuted the charges. More than 3 000 people have been arrested without any court order.⁴⁴ The human rights organizations in various public forums also drew the world's attention of police malpractice, without results.⁴⁵ The authorities denied the connection to al-Qaeda.⁴⁶ Gas canisters and TNT were used – and TNT could be obtained from the mines in the peninsula, or has been abandoned in many places.

On 23rd July, 2005 also three bombs exploded in Sharm es-Seykh.⁴⁷ The attacks took place in three locations: at the Old Market after 10:00 PM, when many tourists were enjoying themselves in the cafés and restaurants. The second bomb exploded near the Moevenpick Hotel,⁴⁸ and the third⁴⁹ in the lobby of Ghazala Garden⁵⁰ hotel.

³⁶ <http://www.allsinai.info/sites/bedouines.htm>

³⁷ http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Egypt/61_eg_ypts_sinai_question.pdf p. 22.

³⁸ Rajeev Agarwal: SINAI: The Middle East's New Hot Spot;

http://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/SINAITheMiddleEastNewHotSpot_ragarwal_301112

³⁹ El-Rashidi, Sara: Egyptian jihadist groups: A threat to domestic, regional security?

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/43365/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-jihadist-groups-A-threat-to-domestic,-reg.aspx>

⁴⁰ Egyptian jihadist groups: A threat to domestic, regional security?

⁴¹ Radical islamist group founded in Egypt, by Shoukri Moustafa (1942-1978)

⁴² Sinai contested: Outlaws, Islamists, Israel and army

⁴³ 57 dead, including 30 Israeli citizens, and more than 180 injured.

⁴⁴ <http://www.dahab-info.com/news/security-in-sinai---recent-kidnappings.html>

⁴⁵ <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/egypt0205.pdf>

⁴⁶ (http://www.globaljihad.net/view_page.asp?id=655)

⁴⁷ : 86 killed, more than 200 injured.

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Between August and November 2005, the Egyptian authorities carried out an operation against extremist groups in the peninsula. Several people were killed, among them Salim Khadr as-Sanub and Khalid Musa'id, identified by the government as key figures in the 2004 and 2005 attacks.

On 24 April 2006 in Dahab three further bombs were detonated and killed several victims, among them one Hungarian.⁵¹

The terrorists died but the terror survives. New groups are born and they grow up. They want an emirate in Sinai. The attacks multiplied. Kidnapping of tourists or soldiers of the MFO, terrorist attacks in Egypt and in Israel, and the destruction of the gas pipeline are the new strategic goals.

The sentences are usually death-penalty. The Egyptian court sentenced to death 14 Islamist militants for involvement in a 2011 attack in the Sinai peninsula.⁵² And 14 Islamists were sentenced to death for the Sinai attack⁵³ in 2011.

AFTER MUBARAK

Since the revolution⁵⁴ in Egypt that removed Mubarak, Sinai has become a battlefield between the state and other jihadist terrorist groups from Egypt, or Gaza. The control of state discontinued, the borders are uncontrollable. The extremist from Egypt and from abroad meet in the Sinai, and they fight with weapons from Libya, and Middle-East.

Initially the bedouins organised these groups, and later the jihadist joined local the bedouins. The tribes who accepted the jihadist ideology are well armed, and co-operate with the terrorist. The other tribes, who don't accept this idea are enemies and targets of the jihadist, and collaborationist with the government.

The fall of Morsi worsened the situation. Left the state without control.

OPERATION EAGLE, 2011 - 2012.

In response of the terrorist attacks, the Morsi cabinet launched a military campaign in August 2011 against the Sinai insurgency. With the beginning of the Eagle operation, the Morsi government declared the war against the terrorists. The state flies against the terrorist groups, muslims are against muslims, the good muslims are against the bad muslims, an islamist government is against the islamism.

In the judgement of the jihadists, the soldiers and policemen are enemies, and unbelievers. Therefore they are attacked by the jihadist at an Egyptian border headquarter. In the massacre of 4 August 2012, killing 16 guards, in the most sacred islamic month, in the Ramadan.

It was responded by launching the 'Operation Sinai' in which the Morsi's cabinet used helicopter gunships to launch missiles on terrorist locations. The use of this kind of weapons is forbidden.

THE TERRORIST GROUPS

Ansar bayt al-Maqdis (Partisans of the Holy Temple)

⁴⁸ The Moevenpick hotel was the favorite hotel of the former president Hosni Mubarak and his family. Negotiations of the Middle East Peace Process also often took place here..

⁴⁹ Also a truck bomb.

⁵⁰ There are two Ghazala hotels. The Ghazala Garden and the Ghazala Beach. The Ghazala Beach is near the seacoast. The Ghazala Garden is located next to the Hilton, where many of the guests from Israel stay. The two hotels are almost next to each other, with a common parking lot. If the attacks had been directed against Israeli citizens, then surely the perpetrators would have chosen the Hilton and not the Ghazala Garden.

⁵¹ : 24 dead –(including two Hungarian tourists), and 100 injured.⁵¹

⁵² Killed seven people

⁵³ Egypt sentences 14 Islamists to death for 2011 Sinai attack, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/14/232260.html>

⁵⁴ January, 2011

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This salafi, jihadi group based in the Sinai desert, and they enlist local bedouins, Egyptians, and some jihadists from other arabs countries e. g. (Lybia, Syria). The group is affiliated with al-Qaeda.

On 21 September 2012 Ansar bayt al-Maqdis attacked a post in the Egypt-Israel border, and killed IDF Cpl. Netanel Yahalomi⁵⁵

On 5 August 2012. masked gunmen attacked an army checkpoint at the Rafah border crossing. At least 15 Egyptian soldiers were killed.

JAYSH AL-ISLAM (ARM OF ISLAM)

The Dugmus clan, which is originally Palestinian, lives in Gaza strip, in 2007 proclaimed themselves as the Jays ah-Islam

They kidnapped a British journalist, Alan Johnson who was freed after four months. In 2011 a bombing attack took place against a coptic church in Alexandria, and its death-toll had 23 persons.

JAHAFIL AL-TAWHID WAL-JIHAD FI FILASTIN (THE ARMIES OF MONOTHEISM AND JIHAD IN PALESTINE)

This sunni Palestinian islamist group is linked by al-Qaeda. They have the responsibility for the bombings in Taba (2004), Sharm El-Seikh (2005) and Dahab (2006). Their „work” is the rocket attacks against the pipeline Egypt-Israel, and the kidnapping of the member of MFO. They kidnapped and murdered the Italian peace activist, Vittorio Arrigoni in 2011.

Keywords: Sinai peninsula, islam, terrorism, Hosni Mubarak, Israel

Kulcsszavak: Sínai-félsziget, iszlám, terrorizmus, Hoszni Mubarak, Izrael

FELHASZNÁLT SZAKIRODALOM

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⁵⁵Lappin, Yaakov: Sinai Salafi group says it was behind deadly attack
<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Sinai-Salafi-group-says-it-was-behind-deadly-attack>
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Ansar Bayt al-Maqdes say attack that killed an Israeli soldier, injured another was carried out in response to anti-Islam film.

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