

ROOTS OF INSTABILITY IN THE SINAI PENINSULA

A Sínai-félszigetnek, mely egy szárazföldi folyosó Afrika és Ázsia között, geostaréjiai jelentősége közismert. Az elmúlt évtizedekben, a félszigeten a túrizmus fellendítése végett hatalmas beruházások történtek. De ezek nehéz helyzetbe hozták a beduinokat, a helyi őslakosokat, akik napjainkban sokszor már a megélhetésükért küzdenek. Néhányan 2004-ben, fegyveres harcot indítottak a kormány ellen.

The security question of the Sinai affects Hungary as well. The safety of the Hungarians – tourist, or member of MFO – defines official Hungarian policy today.

„Late this afternoon a chartered bus operating between the Multinational Force and Observers North Camp in el Gorah, Sinai and Cairo was stopped by armed Bedouins in the vicinity of Bir el Abd, on the main coastal road in North Sinai leading towards the Suez Canal. One passenger, a Hungarian officer serving with the MFO, was removed from the bus.”¹

A decade after the assassination of president *Anwar as-Sadat* in 6 October 1981, the *militant Islamic* resistance movements resumed their activities in 1990², when Islamist extremist gunned down Rifaat al-Mahgoub, the Speaker of Egypt's Parliament.³ "The government is corrupt, un-Islamic, and allied with Israel and the United States, with the enemies of Islam!"- they claimed.

The process started in the Nile Valley and Cairo. After the massacre in Luxor,⁴ when 62 people were killed, the *Gamaa Islamiyya*⁵ and the government declared a ceasefire.

But seven years later a series of bombing attacks took place in the Sinai (in 2004, 2005, and 2006). The terrorists' "repertoire" expanded and today their targets are no longer just the tourists on their way to their destinations, but the MFO units, the pipeline supplying gas to Israel, members of the of military and police forces, and other symbol of the state's power.

The most important security challenges are:

- the uncontrolled flow of drugs and guns through the tunnels on the border of Egypt and Gaza;
- illegal paramilitary groups which carry out combat operations against Israel;
- kidnapping tourists in the South;
- attacks against Egyptian military and police stations;
- attacks against Israeli military, police and civilians;
- armed attack against the MFO mission.

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 sq km)⁶, the Sinai is around 6% (61 000 sq km). The borders of the triangular peninsula are the Mediterranean Sea in the north, the

¹ <http://mfo.org/> (last accessed: 2013.04.11)

² October 1990

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/13/world/mideast-tensions-egypt-s-parliament-speaker-is-assassinated-by-gunmen.html>

⁴ 1997

⁵ Egyptian militant organization, from the late 1970s and responsible for this massacre.

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>

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*).⁷ The territory of the North Sinai Governorate is 27 564 sq km⁸, and that of the southern governorate is 28 438 sq km.⁹ In the western part of the Sinai three other *muhafaza* (Ismailija, Suez and Port Said) straddle the canal, with the bulk of their territory in Africa.

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;¹⁰
- the peninsula is a natural border of protection from any attack or invasion from the North;¹¹
- the large and arid desert of Sinai is a natural defense of the Suez Canal,¹²
- the possession of the peninsula guarantees military domination over the Red Sea.¹³

The governor of the North Sinai, Abdel Wahab Mabrouk was dismissed¹⁴ following a raid (8 August 2012.) that left 16 Egyptian soldiers dead. The governor (*muhafez*) of the southern governorate, Brigadier Khaled Foda had been the governor of the Luxor governorate, where on 17 November 1997, six Islamist terrorist¹⁵ killed 62 tourists at the temple of Hatsepsut.

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,¹⁶ which is on the list of UNESCO,¹⁷ and 5 km from the city is the Hammam Mousa or Moses's Bath, a waypoint of the Jews during the Exodus.

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

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, or *wadis*.

In 1982 the last Israeli soldier left Sinai, and the contingents of the Multinational Force and Observers (*MFO*) assumed control. The *MFO*¹⁸ – for reasons of military efficiency and law enforcement – divided the region into three main sections in Egypt and later on in Israel. Their camps are in el-Ghora¹⁹ (north) and Sarm es-Sejkh in south.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SINAI

The history of Sinai is well known from historical and archaeological research.²⁰ Though the most famous events are Moses meeting God on Mount Sinai, and the Exodus, their dating is very difficult. The name of Israel is first mentioned on the stele of Merneptah.²¹

⁷ <http://www.northsinai.gov.eg>

⁸ <http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

⁹ http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/محافظة_سديناة_جنوب

¹⁰ Turquoise, malachite, copper and oil

¹¹ Hyksos, Assyrian, Turkish, British, or Israeli

¹² Opened in 1869.

¹³ Arabian peninsula (Mecca and Medina, Yemen, Sudan)

¹⁴ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/defense-ministry-will-choose-north-sinai-governor-says-minister>

¹⁵ Gamaa Islamiyya

¹⁶ Built in the 6. century by Byzantine emperor Justinian.

¹⁷ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/194/>

¹⁸ „An independent international organization, with peacekeeping responsibilities in the Sinai.”(<http://mfo.org>)

¹⁹ 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.)

²⁰ The first ruins are nine stonetombs, from B.C. 4000-3100.

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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, Medina²², Yemen, and Syria-Palestine.

During the Crusades, when Egypt was under the control of the Fatimids, the Ayyubids and the Mamluks,²³ the importance of the peninsula grew. Many fortresses and castles were built during these centuries.

The importance of the Sinai did not diminish under the Ottomans. Even after the opening the Suez Canal 1869, the peninsula was a part of the world politics.

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 1967 Six Day War Israel occupied the Sinai.

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

In 1982, the last Israeli soldiers left Egypt, and the mission of MFO started. The last area which was returned to the control of Egypt, was Taba, the small city on the Israeli border.

POPULATION

The population of the Sinai is 380 500; 314 000 live in the northern and 66 500 in the southern governorate, which is the least populated governorate in Egypt. About 60% of the population is Bedouin. About 11-13 tribes live in the peninsula.²⁴

The Egyptians moved to the Sinai to find work in tourism.²⁵ The largest minority is the Palestinians (50-70 000).²⁶ 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.²⁷

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 Bedouin areas and "exiled" many tribes of 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 to most of the land, saying that they had not lived on the coast before 1982."²⁸

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.²⁹

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

²¹ The most reliable source is a stele of pharaoh Merneptah (reigned 1212-1203 BC), which mentions that he destroyed the people of Israel.

²² The two holiest Islamic cities.

²³ Crusades: 1096-1272; Fatimids: 909-1171; Ayyubids: 1174-1250; Mamluks: 1250-1517

²⁴ <http://www.allsinai.info/sites/bedouines.htm>

²⁵ <http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1>

²⁶ International Crisis Group, 1.oldal

²⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/01/us-egypt-sinai-idUSBRE83006120120401>

²⁸ <http://www.allsinai.info/sites/bedouines.htm>

²⁹ <http://www.allsinai.info/sites/bedouines.htm>

³⁰ http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Egypt/61_eg_ypts_sinai_question.pdf p. 22.

The local Palestinians have extensive contacts with the Palestinians 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.

- Aleiqa: The first tribe of Sinai, This tribe lives on the west coast of Sinai. They settled in „Egypt” at the time of the first Islamic conquest (640-641A.D.)
- Gebeleyya: People of the mountains. This small tribe, about 1500 people, lives around the monastery of Saint Catherine. Originally they are not Arabs. They came from the Balkan, in the time of the Emperor Justinian, to protect and serve the monks.
- Laheiwat: This tribe lives in three areas, not in one. (Southeast Sinai, the Mediterranean Sea, and along the Suez Canal .
- Museina: The people of the largest tribe live in southern Sinai, and in the cities, like Sarm es-Sejkh and Dahab. But today, a part of the Museina tribe lives in Jordan, and Saudi-Arabia.
- Tarabin and Tiyaha: These two tribes are Palestinians. They live on the border of Egypt and Israel. "The traditional lands of the Tarabeen, for instance, extend from the Egyptian–Gazan border as far east as Beersheva and as far west as Sinai's west coast."³¹

TERRORIST ATTACKS

The first extremist *sheikh*, Ayyjoub Sheikh Suleyman Abu Rafah, appeared in the peninsula in 1986. He had close ties to the organization called Takfir va-l-Hijra.³²

In the history of Egypt, 17 November 1997, was a „Black Day:” it was the latest large-scale terrorist attack, in which 62 people, mostly tourists³³ and Egyptians policemen died in Luxor.³⁴

After this brutal massacre the government and the terrorists made peace. But in 2004 terror returned to Egypt, but moved from the Nile Valley to the Sinai.

TIME AND PLACE

Taba is a small Egyptian town and port in the Gulf of Aqaba near the border Israel, which has become a tourist Paradise from the mid 80s. There are luxury hotels and casinos, which are forbidden in Israel. Taba is a popular vacation destination for the tourists from Israel, for some days, or weeks.

On 7 October 2004³⁵ three bomb attacks targeted tourist in the Sinai. In the first attack a truck bomb was driven into the Hilton and exploded, killing more than 30 holidaymakers. The second and third blasts shook campsites at Ras al-Shitan, near the Nuweiba city.

On 23 July 2005 three bombs exploded in the largest resort city of the Sinai, in Sharm es-Seykh. The attacks took place in three locations: at the Old Market after 10:00 PM, when many tourist were enjoying themselves in the cafés and restaurants. The second bomb exploded near the Moevenpick Hotel,³⁶ and the third³⁷ in the lobby of Ghazala Garden³⁸ hotel.

³¹ <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/pr0912pelham.pdf>

³² Radical Islamist group founded in Egypt, by Shoukri Moustafa (1942-1978)

³³ In the view of Islamist extremist the tourists are a living symbol of the decadence of West, the debauched Western society.

³⁴ A very famous and frequently visited historical, and archeological site in southern Egypt, the location of the tomb of Tutankhamon, and the temples Luxor and Karnak.

³⁵ Sukkot

³⁶ 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..

³⁷ Also a truck bomb.

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

THE VICTIMS

The numbers of killed and injured people are controversial, therefore the official numbers from the webpage of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry are provided below:

- 2004. Taba: 57 dead, including 30 Israeli citizens, and more than 180 injured.
- 2005. Sharm El-Sheik: 86 killed, more than 200 injured.
- 2006. Dahab: 24 dead –(including two Hungarian tourists), and 100 injured.³⁹

THE DATES, THE NATIONAL DAYS

The three dates of the massacres have symbolic significance in the history of Egypt, thus, the terrorists were sending messages for the government.

7 OCTOBER (2004)

The Fourth Arab-Israeli war⁴⁰ started on 6 October 1973 to 25 October 1973, when Egypt and Syria challenged Israel. After the war without a victor, the first day of the war became a national holiday in Egypt, with annual military parades. On this day, in 1981 Muslim extremist killed the president Sadat.

23 JULY (2005)

The July 23 "Revolution Day," when the Free Officers overthrew the monarchy of Farouk I, last king of the Mohamed Aly dynasty, reigned from 1936 to 1952.

24 APRIL (2006)

After the withdrawal of Israeli forces the peninsula began a part of Egypt, and from this date the peninsula was a demilitarized territory, monitored by the MFO. This is the Sinai Liberation Day (25 April).

THE INVESTIGATIONS

After the Taba massacre, in which Israeli citizens died, 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.⁴¹ The human rights organizations in various public forums also drew the world's attention of police malpractice, without results.

The authorities denied the connection to al-Qaeda.⁴² Gas canisters and TNT were used – and TNT could be obtained from the mines in the peninsula, or has been abandoned in many places.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ <http://konzuliszolgalat.kormany.hu/afrika?egyiptom>

⁴⁰ Ramadan War, or October War in Egypt, and Yom Kippur War in Israel

⁴¹ <http://www.dahab-info.com/news/security-in-sinai---recent-kidnappings.html>

⁴² (http://www.globaljihad.net/view_page.asp?id=655)

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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.⁴³

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

The president *Mursi* recognized importance of the sheikhs of the tribes, one of his first visits was to the Sinai.

Keywords: islam, MFO, Sinai, militant Islamic, Anwar as-Sadat

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