

**The Military Coup in Egypt as a Catalyst for
Increased Terrorist Activity in Egypt and the Sinai
Peninsula**

Last week's military coup in Egypt, which culminated in the overthrow of the sitting President Mohamed Morsi and the arrest of hundreds of his Muslim Brotherhood supporters, has given rise to mass demonstrations by the Muslim Brotherhood, which is unwilling to concede defeat or accept this loss of power and its removal from Morsi's hands in what was a distinctly undemocratic move. The demonstrations have quickly devolved into physical violence and bloodshed. This worrying development shows that Egypt is progressing toward civil war – between the Islamist camp of the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups, and the secular and military camp. Jihadist groups, chief among them Al-Qaeda, are fanning the flames of this explosive situation, and raising their tone against the secular opposition and the Egyptian military.

On July 5, 2013, some 24 hours after Morsi was deposed, a video clip was posted to Facebook and Twitter, which appeared to feature **Ayman al-Zawahiri's** response to the dramatic developments in Egypt. The video clip, which was published by a relatively unknown jihadist media institution called Katibat Yosri Al-Tariqi, received extensive coverage from the Arab media.¹ The daily *Al-Sabil*, an organ of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, claimed that its examination of the clip revealed it to be a re-edited version of comments previously made by al-Zawahiri, which had nothing to do with the deposition of Morsi.² Whether the video clip is new or old and reconstituted, the timing of its publication is significant, since al-Zawahiri's comments do influence jihadists – and have important implications for actual events.



In the video clip, Al-Zawahiri blamed Morsi's overthrow and the disintegration of order in Egypt on the Islamists. The Muslim Brotherhood had erred in earnest, he stated, by trusting and allying itself with the Egyptian military – for after all, the Egyptian military had ties with the US and with members of the previous regime. The Muslim Brotherhood had not been wise enough to learn from its harsh experience with the Egyptian Army under Gamal Abd al-

¹ The clip appeared on the group's Facebook page. See: <https://www.facebook.com/yosrikatiba>.

² <http://www.assabeel.net/arab-and-international/egypt/149847-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%8A.html>.

Nasser, who had hounded and executed them. "This bitter reality", al-Zawahiri stated, had done nothing to bring Islamist leaders to power. "Many [members of the Muslim Brotherhood] praised the Military Council after the revolution, and forgot who they are, what they believe, and what path they follow. They [the Muslim Brotherhood] should have rebelled against [the military] as a remnant of the corrupt secular regime. Instead, they automatically surrendered to the secular camp, capitulating to the dictates of secular law".

According to Al-Zawahiri, the Islamists, like the Salafists, had joined the political game in Egypt and found various excuses to justify their actions. Instead of standing together as one to defend Islamic law [shari'a], the Islamists and Salafists competed against each other to win the elections and a seat in parliament. This prevented the Muslim Brotherhood candidate from winning the presidential election in the first round, and led the Brotherhood to make a hasty alliance with the secular camp, the Christians, and the enemies of Islam merely so that its candidate could win.

Al-Zawahiri insisted that "everyone knows that the battle in Egypt is between the secular minority, which has formed an alliance with the church, which in turn relies on the support of the military – a fabrication of the US – and the Muslim Nation [ummah], which aspires to impose Islamic law and free itself from American hegemony. This is the real battle. The enemies of Islam have military might, security forces, and money for the press and media". Moreover, Al-Zawahiri said, "the battle in Egypt is not over; it has only just begun. The revolution must continue. The Muslim Nation must sacrifice martyrs until it reaches its goal and eliminates the corrupt forces that rule Egypt, making it once again a bastion of solidarity and Islam".

Sheikh Abu Abd al-Ilah al-Jijli al-Jazaari, a prominent leader of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), also denounced recent bloody events, calling the Egyptian military a cancer and secular Egyptians a bacteria that is making the body of the Muslim Nation ill. He insisted that the Egyptian military was deliberately attacking the Muslim Egyptian people. He expressed his disappointment at the world's silent, tacit support of the coup and the appointment of Adli Mansour, the head of the Egyptian Supreme Court – and a Christian – as interim president. This was just another sign of the trend of appointing Christians to head Muslim states – in Nigeria, Indonesia, and now Egypt. How could a Coptic Christian minority, which constitutes only 10% of the entire Egyptian population, rule over a Muslim majority in a Muslim country?, asked al-Jazaari. That a Christian should come to power in

Egypt instead of a Muslim!? This flouts the wishes of every Egyptian and every Muslim!, he stated. Moreover, it is clearly an attempt to isolate Egypt from the Islamic world and alienate the Egyptian people from Islam, so that Egypt can serve as a shield for Israel. The Egyptian people must therefore show more determination in their opposition to the military coup. They must not allow the remnants of Mubarak's regime to return, "as this would mean that [the Egyptian people] would be put back in a dark, cold isolation cell, there to endure severe torture". To live honorably, the Egyptian people, men and women, must oppose the coup and stand strong behind the Islamic program, declaring an Islamic revolution grounded in Islamic law [shari'a].³

Escalation on the Ground

It now appears that the military coup in Egypt has upset the balance of deterrence that existed during Morsi's tenure between the Egyptian military and the jihadist groups in the Sinai Peninsula. Only one day after the coup, **Ansar Al-Sunnah in the Environs of Jerusalem**, a Palestinian Salafi-jihadist group active in the Sinai Peninsula, took responsibility for firing two rockets at the Israeli city of Eilat.⁴



In addition to the jihadists' obvious intention of heating up the border with Israel, other armed groups in the Sinai Peninsula are increasingly calling for clashes with the Egyptian military. For example, in the name of the jihadist groups in the Sinai Peninsula, **Ahfadh Al-Sahaba in the Sinai** [Descendents of the Comrades of the Prophet Muhammad in the Sinai Peninsula] declared the establishment of a war council, which would plot to evict the Egyptian military, police, and security forces from the Sinai.⁵ As if to punctuate this trend of escalation, the gas pipeline that runs between the Sinai Peninsula and Jordan was bombed on July 7, 2013.⁶

It is our assessment that the escalation in the Sinai Peninsula is being coordinated with Sheikh Muhammad al-Zawahiri, the brother of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and himself a leader of the Egyptian Salafi-jihadist movement with close ties to jihadists in the Sinai. Several days before the military coup, and given increasing fears for the stability of

³ <http://al-fidaa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=68300>.

⁴ <http://al-fidaa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=68335>.

⁵ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzYb1N_uGQQ.

⁶ <http://onaeg.com/?p=1061275>.

the Morsi regime, Muhammad al-Zawahiri held a series of meetings with jihadist groups in the Sinai, apparently to coordinate a defense of Morsi's regime.⁷ At that time, Muhammad al-Zawahiri also noted that his friends would respond to any developments "in due time".⁸ Once Morsi had been removed from office, Muhammad al-Zawahiri issued a religious-legal ruling [fatwa] authorizing jihad against Egypt's secular opposition, military, and police force – in response to the illegal military coup. He insisted that it was an obligation to defend Morsi and the agenda of making Egypt an Islamic theocracy.⁹

Summary

In light of the above, it appears that Egypt is teetering at the top of a slippery slope to civil war, which the jihadists are happy to provoke. The global jihadist discourse orchestrated by Al-Qaeda is stepping up its propaganda against Egypt's security forces, secular opposition and Coptic Christians, all of whom it sees as bitter enemies of Islamism who wish only to thwart Egypt's transformation into an Islamic state.

It is important to note that jihadists' attempts to increase the ethnic and religious tensions between Egypt's Christians and Muslims are reminiscent of a period of inter-ethnic tension that began in 2010. At that time, the conversion to Islam of a young Egyptian Christian woman named Kamilia Shehata, who was purportedly imprisoned by the Coptic church to prevent her from joining the Muslim Nation, sparked a wave of terrorist attacks against Christian churches and leaders throughout the Arab world. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates exploited the Kamilia Shehata affair to shake the stability of Arab regimes and amass political gains.¹⁰ The wave of attacks subsided with the outbreak of the Arab Spring in early 2011 – apparently because Al-Qaeda deliberately chose to practice self-restraint so that it could present itself as a party to the Arab Spring revolutions, and not be seen as an obstacle to them. It was not by chance that Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri declared in February 2011 that Al-Qaeda's principal aim was to fight the West and the Zionists, rather than the Christians who live in Islamic lands. Nevertheless, since the military coup in Egypt, it seems that it is again becoming "popular" to stir up inter-ethnic strife in Egypt – primarily because Egypt's Christians identify with the secular opposition and are allied with the Egyptian military.

⁷ <http://onaeg.com/?p=1050488>.

⁸ <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/215351>.

⁹ <http://www.elmogaz.com/node/98802>.

¹⁰ For an extended discussion of the incident and how it was appropriated by Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups, see: <http://www.ict.org.il/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=10HEyTnFY6Y%3d&tabid=320>.

Not only Al-Qaeda has escalated its rhetoric, however. Increasingly, Islamist groups that have to date been considered moderate and that have heretofore shunned violence are also showing signs of growing extremism. For example, on June 30, 2013, the **Salafist Front**, an Egyptian political group, declared it obligatory to repel the secular demonstrators, who are allied with Christians, from Tahrir Square – even if doing so means killing them.¹¹ **Al-Gama'ah Al-Islamiyyah** also stated that it does not intend *not* to respond to the military coup, and that it will pay any price to see Morsi's rule reinstated.¹²

undoubtedly, the military coup in Egypt has fed the Islamists', and especially the Muslim Brotherhood's, feelings of frustration, rage and disappointment at how the Egyptian military has conducted itself. The realization that the Egyptian military wishes to see a democratic process that will ensure secular rule only, and the attendant marginalization of Islamists, is causing Islamists to question whether the political arena is the one in which they should be acting, or whether they should employ more violent means to take by force what they feel they deserve, as is becoming apparent. One thing is clear: Al-Qaeda and its jihadist colleagues are already exploiting the sensitive climate in Egypt to upset the delicate balance there, and to promote their own agenda.

¹¹<http://almesryoon.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9/166863-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%89-%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%89-30-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%87>.

¹²<http://www.almesryoon.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9/183583-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A3%D9%8A-%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A9-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9>.