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## Preliminary Report

### Sinai Egypt mosque attack

#### I. THE INCIDENT

On Friday 24 November 2017 gunmen opened fire and bombed Al-Rawdah mosque, in Sinai Peninsula during Friday prayers, which also known as the birthplace of an important Sufi cleric. Government officials have reported that 305 people were killed and more than 128 had also been injured in the attack among the deadliest in Egypt's history. The rising death toll included 27 children. According to the state-run MENA news agency, the mosque is largely attended by Sufi Muslims - a form of Islam considered heretical by some conservatives and extremists.



Islamic State operating in the area had previously warned elders of Al-Rawdah village to stop collaborating with security forces and to suspend rituals associated with Islam's mystical Sufi movement. The latest warning came as recently as a week before the attack, telling villagers not to hold Sufi rituals on 29-30 November to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. As yet there has not been a claim of responsibility from ISIS or its affiliate in Egypt or any known terrorist group. President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi declared condemned the attack and called for three-day mourning.

## II. ANALYSIS

- The attack bears the hallmarks of ISIS, which maintains a foothold in the north of the Sinai Peninsula and inspires local Islamist extremist groups - the Wilayat Sinai affiliate, which pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2014, has been behind numerous attacks and hundreds of deaths in the desert region. Egyptian security forces are battling on regular basis, attacks from militants with ISIS ties in northern Sinai.
- For the fact that ISIS considers Sufis to be heretic, Sufi mosque can possibly be a legitimate target in the eyes of ISIS, even though all worshippers probably were not Sufi. By that creating a rift within the Sunni populations.
- The Sawarkah tribe – who constitute a larger number of the inhabitants in the area, have been cooperating with Egyptian government in its campaign against Wilayat Sinai, something that ISIS was against, therefore this might be a retaliation from the militants.
- There might be a direct link between the terrorist attacks in Egypt and the unstable security situation in Libya - militants might be using the area close to Egyptian borders as a safe haven to plan their terrorist attacks inside Egypt. The recent devastating attack carried by terrorist group named “HASM” on a convoy of Egyptian police inside the western desert proved the involvement of a Libyan militant, *Abdelrahim Abadallah*, who was arrested by the Egyptian security forces in a raid after the attack. This may demonstrate a level of coordination between the different ISIS Affiliates operating in the region.
- Given the death toll, nature of the target and casualties, a group responsible for this attack, is unlikely to claim responsibility in fear of losing popularity/support within the population.
- If it turns out ISIS is behind the attack, this could be a reflection of their willingness to continue large operations that bare massive casualties, an may raise suspicions that ISIS militants fleeing Iraq and Syria are finding their way into Egypt.

## III. CONCLUSIONS

Sinai Peninsula has witnessed a number of terrorist attacks over the years; most of the major terrorist attacks, however, were against Christians, targeting churches. This attack marks the deadliest against the Muslim community in the area. Egypt in its fight against terrorism should work to strengthen cooperation with its neighboring countries, particularly Libya, whose security situation could spill over into Egypt.