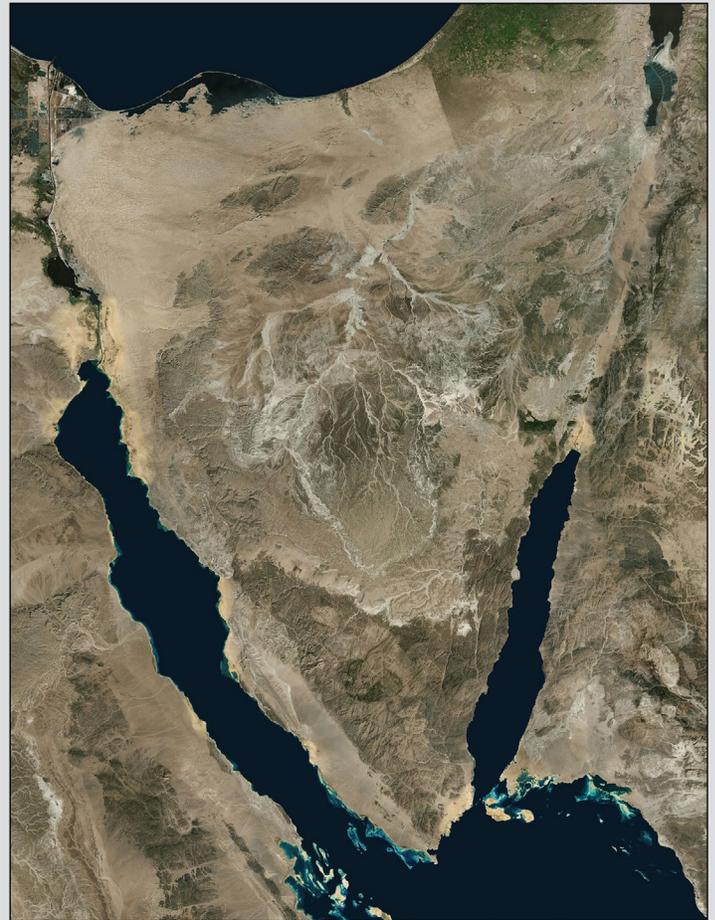


# Global Cultural Knowledge Network

**GCKN**  
GLOBAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK



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## Fault Lines: The Sinai Peninsula

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# Fault Lines: The Sinai Peninsula

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## Executive Summary

The Sinai Peninsula is a breeding ground of militant Islamic insurgent activity. Egypt is battling this situation with large-scale security operations, yet militant activity is not diminishing. The Egyptian government, in coordination with the Israeli government, is placing renewed interest on countering insurgent actors in the region and establishing a lasting security. Despite its best effort, Egypt has been largely unsuccessful. GCKN submits the most likely reasons for instability in this region, and the greatest potential contributors to continuing future instability, are four key fault lines.<sup>i</sup> Understanding these fault lines, how actors in the region may exploit them, and the implications of exploitation may provide stakeholders in the region with actionable insight into resolving the security situation of the Sinai.

- **Egypt-Israel Relations:** Enduring geopolitical tension between Egypt and Israel, and complex coordination needs between dissimilar and traditionally untrusting cultures, has potential for explosive effects on regional stability.
- **Political Instability:** Continued political instability, generated from leadership turmoil, mounting security concerns, and insufficient efforts for economic development may lead to an exponentially dire security situation and direct and violent challenges to the government.
- **Political Alienation:** Years of neglect combined with a decade of Israeli occupation has created an environment where the Sinai people feel politically disenfranchised, indignant, and desperate and this puts the population in a vulnerable position to be influenced by external stakeholders.
- **Economic Deprivation:** A lack of economic opportunities, discrimination against the Bedouins for rightful employment, and the growth of an illicit economy fosters an ideal operational environment for insurgent activity.

<sup>i</sup> A **fault line** is "an exploitable source of instability in the human domain. Fault lines can be real or perceived." (GCKN Fault Line Methodology, 2017)

## Introduction

The *Fault Lines* series is a series of analytic products that provides assessments about potential sources of instability within operational environments (OEs). These assessments discuss how these potential sources of instability in the environment can be exploited by an actor to gain or maintain leverage with the population. Understanding the fault lines that exist in an OE and how an actor may exploit them is essential for obtaining a holistic understanding of the OE; understanding the fault lines in a society better positions analysts to predict future events in that OE.

### METHODOLOGY

The analytic judgments made in the Fault Line series are grounded in a social science-based research and analysis methodology developed by GCKN social scientists. The methodology is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods fused with a rigorous co-creation process. At GCKN, this co-creation involves social scientists, military analysts, geographic information system analysts, intelligence analysts, and subject matter experts (SMEs). While the bulk of the research and writing takes place by analysts working for GCKN, the methodology integrates experts on the region of study throughout the process ensuring maximum validity of the judgments. The final product of the methodology is a number of assessed fault lines that are ground in a defensible methodology and able to withstand critical scrutiny.

The OE for this study is the Sinai Peninsula. This assessment discusses four fault lines. Beginning with the macro fault lines and continuing to more micro fault lines, each section presents an in-depth look at the conditions and support as they manifest today in the OE. The sections on exploitation mechanisms and implications highlight how the fault lines might be exploited by stakeholders in the region and the ramifications of that exploitation.

### THE SINAI

The fault lines identified in this assessment reflect the intersection of conditions across the operational variables and reveal the most significant and challenging of the conditions in the environment. GCKN assesses the fault lines identified in this product as conditions that, if exploited, could rapidly increase instability in the Sinai. Those fault lines are: **Egypt-Israel relations, political instability, political alienation, and economic deprivation.**

There are two meta-themes readers will see across the four fault lines: geography and identity. The Sinai OE is a peninsula connecting two continents with a stretch of mountainous and desert terrain. It is a sparsely populated frontier with little infrastructure that has not been a development priority for the Egyptian government in decades. As a result, the Sinai has become a detached environment within Egypt with distinctive laws and policies that guide political, social, and economic life, different from those that govern the population west of the Suez Canal. The effects of the geographic isolation are closely related to a pervasive identity incoherency where the people of the Sinai have been unable to generate an identity that aligns with mainland Egypt. A number of factors contribute to this, including, but not limited to, social norms, political and economic marginalization, ethnic ties, and the influence of outside actors. The result is an environment where the Sinai population, and the Bedouin in particular, are subjected to a sense of “otherness,” where they are viewed as “uncivilized and unskilled” non-Egyptians and treated as second-class citizens.<sup>1</sup> The geographic separation of the peninsula not only contributes to identity confusion of the inhabitants, but effectively creates a disenfranchised population.

1	<b>Egypt-Israel Relations</b>	<b>MODERATE</b> Improbable with major consequence
2	<b>Political Instability</b>	<b>HIGH</b> Very likely with moderate consequence
3	<b>Political Alienation</b>	<b>SIGNIFICANT</b> Probable with major consequence
4	<b>Economic Deprivation</b>	<b>SIGNIFICANT</b> Improbable with extreme consequence

## Summary of Analysis

### FAULT LINE 1: EGYPT-ISRAEL RELATIONS

The enduring geopolitical tension between Egypt and Israel, as it relates to the Sinai Peninsula, has the potential for explosive regional effects. The reasons for this tension are culturally and historically entrenched.

Currently, stakes are high for both countries and the effect of erupting tensions could range from hostile rhetoric and limited security cooperation to full-blown conflict. Egypt and Israel cooperate as a result of a binding peace treaty and a shared security threat, but struggle with a hostile and violent past and deeply-rooted cultural conflicts.

**GCKN assesses that the enduring geopolitical tension between Egypt and Israel, and complex coordination needs between dissimilar and traditionally untrusting cultures, has potential for explosive effects on regional stability.**

### BACKGROUND

The relationship between Egypt and Israel is one of the most exemplary cold peace<sup>ii</sup> relationships in the modern age.<sup>2</sup> Although diplomatic and military relations between Egypt and Israel are suggested to be at an all-time high, the relationship may be simply rooted in shared strategic security interests.<sup>3</sup> Their relationship is shaped by a complicated and stormy past involving five wars and the occupation of land, outside proxies to both support and mediate conflict, and the relaxing of cultural clashes to tackle regional security interests directly affecting both countries.

Geographically, the Sinai has been a focal point of political and security concerns between Egypt and Israel for over four decades. Occupied by Israel after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and returned to Egypt following the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, the Sinai Peninsula is critical geography and its security concerns, while serving as the impetus to positive relations between the two regional powers, are at same time potential flashpoints for tensions.

### STRATEGICALLY FRIENDS

Egypt and Israel have been loosely at peace for more than thirty years. Nearly forty years ago, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin negotiated two critical frameworks that later became the foundation of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. Although the 1947 United Nations resolution sparked outrage and conflict between most Arab nations and Israel, the 1979 agreement notably made Egypt the first Arab state to officially recognize the State of Israel.<sup>4</sup> The power of the treaty is far greater than just peace for two countries, it has implications spanning two continents and has been referred to as “the cornerstone for regional security.”<sup>5</sup>

Egypt has emerged as an important partner of Israel, and Israel of Egypt. A former defense minister of Israel recently stated that “Egypt is not only our closest friend in the region, the co-operation between us goes beyond the strategic.”<sup>6</sup>

The terms of the 1979 treaty are specific and outline cross-border regulations and the rules of engagement for both countries. However, at the time of its development, the parties did not foresee a situation where non-state actors in the Sinai would operate openly and be a major contributor to the insecurity of both countries. Under the treaty, the Sinai is divided into four zones and restricts military use in each zone (See Figure 1). By demilitarizing this area, the Sinai Peninsula acts as a geographic buffer zone to comfortably contain concerns and enable peaceful relations. Egypt has experienced a great deal of disruption since 2011 and numerous factors—particularly political and economic—have contributed to motivating insurgent behaviors and creating an environment where over ten different non-state actors can take root and grow. Now, both countries are suffering the effects.

The treaty allows for ad-hoc changes provided both parties agree.<sup>iii</sup> The proliferation of insurgent operations combined with enduring militant activities

ii Cold peace is a state of relative peace between two countries often marked by the enforcement of a peace treaty ending the state of war. Although the parties are not overtly engaged in conflict, one or both of the governments, and/or one or both of the populations, continue to treat the treaty with vocal disgust.

iii The Agreed Activities Mechanism allows Egypt and Israel to jointly alter the arrangements of Egyptian troops in the Sinai without having to officially review the treaty itself.

in the Sinai has forced both countries to adjust the terms, even if temporarily. Over the past several years, Egypt, without permission, deployed forces and used weapons in the Sinai beyond the scope of the peace treaty.<sup>iv</sup> Rather than engage militants in Sinai, Israel has relied on Egypt to operate more aggressively and freely near the border and has “de-facto accept[ed] the remilitarization of eastern Sinai and is currently relying on the Egyptian military to at least contain the situation in the Sinai.”<sup>v</sup> Since taking power in 2014, Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and government authorities have kept the Sinai border with Gaza largely sealed. This understanding has helped maintain relations between Egypt and Israel but has negatively impacted Sinai residents who rely on trans-border trade for economy and services. The stifled economy of struggling residents has resulted in the support of illicit economies and militant operations.

Egypt and Israel, formidable enemies at one time, are working together to fill the security vacuum in the Sinai. Recent events there resulting from a mix of political alienation, economic deprivation, and a security vacuum/militant security stronghold are concerning to both governments. Everything seems, at least for now, to be agreeable. But given their storied past and fundamentally different cultural values (such as approaches to economic development, governance, and human rights concerns), some argue that “the combustible mix of militancy in the Sinai has the capacity to affect Egypt’s relations with Israel.”<sup>8</sup>

### FUNDAMENTALLY FOES?

While a treaty requires both parties to behave diplomatically, it does not regulate hostility, or erase a painful history of conflict. Regardless of a shared strategic objective and news reports suggesting the relationship to be at its highest in their history, the ground truth may not be as optimistic. According to a 2015 poll, the Egyptian public views Israel as the nation most hostile to

its interests.<sup>9</sup> The ongoing challenge, at its very core, is rooted in identity issues of otherness and competing narratives.

The long-standing Zionist petition and narrative for a Jewish homeland in Palestine was given unprecedented favor following World War II to provide refuge for the persecuted Jews of Europe. In 1947, the UN passed a resolution recommending the “Partition Plan,” which would divide the country into a Jewish state, an Arab state, and an UN-controlled territory around Jerusalem. The Arab League, a political organization representing Arab community of interests in the area, unanimously rejected the UN partition plan and were “bitterly opposed to a Jewish

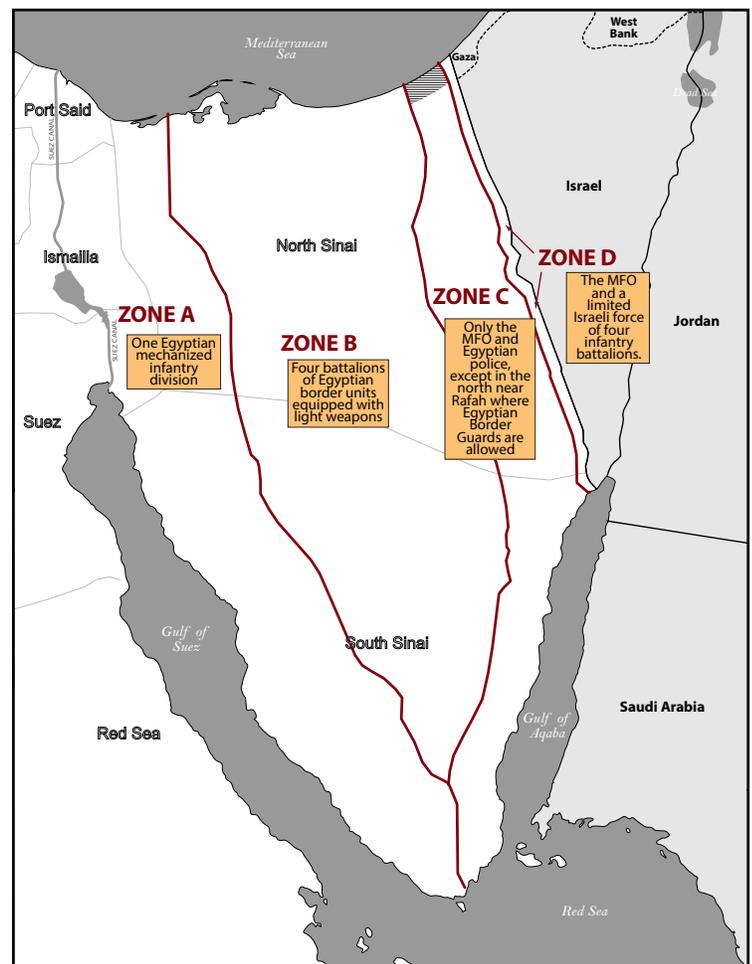


Figure 1. Sinai security zones.

- iv In August 2012, the Egyptian military entered the de-militarized zone without Israeli approval, in violation of the peace treaty terms. Egypt has also been reported to have deployed anti-air missiles on the Israeli border.
- v The British were also weary from a very active and deadly Jewish insurgent terror campaign in Palestine, which took up more precious blood and treasure fighting the very people who the Nazis had spent years trying to exterminate.

State.<sup>10</sup> The resolution created outrage in Arab nations, especially Egypt, which began to launch raids into Jewish settlements in 1947. Within a year, the situation erupted into the 1948-49 Israel-Arab War between the nascent state of Israel and five Arab Nations, including Egypt, as well as the Palestinians themselves.<sup>11</sup> vi The result was the state of Israel largely in the place of the former Palestinian Mandate, and hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees.<sup>vii</sup> Still referred to as *al-Nakbah* (Arabic for 'catastrophe'), this is the most intractable conflict in the Middle East.<sup>12,13</sup>

Since the 1948 war Israel and Egypt have fought three major wars and have engaged in scores of battles, raids, and skirmishes; seventy years of conflict that has amounted to a lot of loss by both nations. Egyptian and Israeli leadership both hoped the 1979 treaty would dissipate tension and create continued support for the partnership, but Egyptian support was turbulent. In fact, the Egyptian ambassador to Israel was recalled on a number of occasions since the 1980s including the assassination of Anwar Sadat (1981), the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982), and the Second Intifada (2001-2005).<sup>14,15</sup>

Relations between the two nations soured in 2011 after the revolution in Egypt.<sup>16</sup> When Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak resigned and the Egyptian Army took power, there were serious concerns about the future of the treaty, but the then-ruling Egyptian Army vowed to abide by all agreements and continued to respect the treaty's mandate.<sup>17</sup> Egypt's May 2011 decision to open the border between Sinai and Gaza at Rafah infuriated the Israelis, who viewed the action as a way to officially dismiss and even emasculate Israeli control. However, Egyptians viewed Israeli actions in Gaza, especially their blockade, as callous, especially considering the many Palestinian families now living in Gaza that had been displaced from other areas of Palestine in 1948.<sup>viii</sup> Additionally, and beyond sympathy based on *al-Nakbah*, there have always been significant personal ties between the people in North Sinai and the Gaza Strip, as Arabs from both areas share ancient tribal and cultural ties.<sup>18</sup>

The attack on the Israeli Embassy in Cairo in September of 2011 created serious concerns about the future of the relationship. Although condemned by the Egyptian government, the attack brought rise to the ongoing cultural clashes between the two nations and created questions of the possibility of true peace and the future of an extended peaceful partnership.

Making the situation worse, in August of 2012, when relations were already struggling, the Egyptian military entered the de-militarized zone without Israeli approval, an action in direct violation of the peace treaty terms.<sup>19</sup> Egypt has also been reported to have deployed anti-air missiles on the Israeli border, a move which clearly targeted Israel. It is important to note that this action was related to the step Egypt took during the lead up to the 1956 October war.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of these troubles, relations improved significantly between Israel and Egypt after Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, a democratically-elected leader, was extra-judicially ousted by the military in 2013. Since then, both countries have been cooperating to counter the Sinai insurgent activity and notably, Israel has agreed to Egypt to increasing the number of its troops deployed in the Sinai beyond the terms of the treaty. Egyptian-Israeli relations today are at their highest level in history and seem to be mainly predicated on their coming together to solve their common security crisis of violent extremists operating around and across their shared border.<sup>21</sup> The Sinai region is not only a geography that both governments rely on to maintain diplomacy amongst a stormy past and cultural differences but has undoubtedly become home to a group of people who do not necessarily identify as Egyptians or Israelis as much as they do as Sinai people. There are several factors that have allowed the Sinai Peninsula to become home to a range of armed non-state actors, including militant Bedouin and Islamic groups. These include a lack of bi-lateral cooperation between two nations who share an area replete with ethnic dissimilarity, hostile interactions, and limited trust.

vi Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the Arab League

vii Reports suggest as many as 700,000 were displaced in 1948 as a result of forced relocations. As many as 7 million Palestinian refugees today are the result of the establishment of Israel.

viii The Egyptian response to Israeli actions in Gaza is ironic as Egypt enacted some of the the harshest restrictions of Palestinian refugees from *al-Nakbah*, refusing them entry into Egypt. William Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East, 3rd Ed.*, Boulder: Westview Press, 2004, pp. 357-358.

While some reporting suggests relations between these nations are strategically and diplomatically positive, other reports suggest the relationship continues to be hostile. Both countries perpetuate an aggressive narrative. Egypt additionally has pan-ethnic ties to Palestinians as well as other Arab nations, while Israel clings to a marginalized status as a singular Jewish state surrounded by collective and hostile Arab agents. Their narratives and their identities are at constant odds.

Stakes are arguably high at present. All of these issues, taken separately or together, make these two countries incredibly vulnerable for exploitation. Relationships with pain points are naturally vulnerable; thus both parties need to be acutely aware that vulnerabilities exist and do what is necessary to protect others from exploiting it.

A U.S. Army officer recently stationed on the Sinai Peninsula with the Multinational Force & Observers (MFO), said that the people in the Sinai commonly refer to the relationship between the two countries and issues surrounding this volatile geography as “their Vietnam.”<sup>23</sup>

### EXPLOITATION MECHANISMS

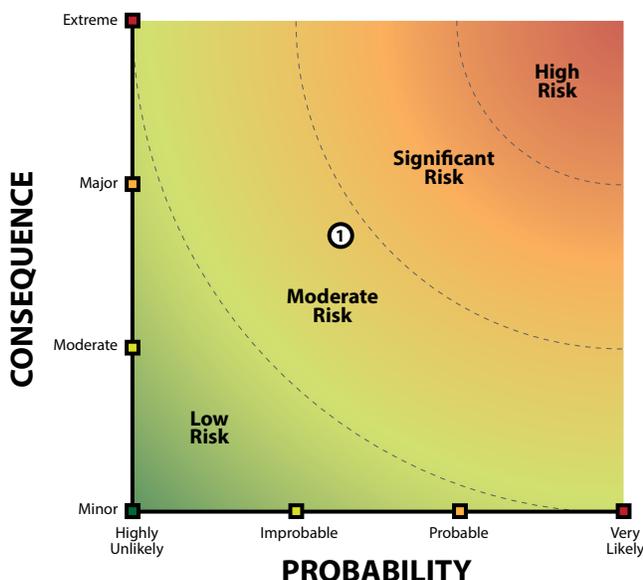
Although Egypt and Israel’s unprecedented level

of cooperation is promising to the region’s stability, their shared history of conflict, distrust, and ire is a condition ripe for exploitation in the Sinai OE. Opportunistic actors in the region are not only knowledgeable regarding past tensions, but also skilled in exploiting new, developing, or even surface bonds. This could be accomplished through information campaigns designed to exacerbate historical tensions between the two countries and incite frustration and anger primarily in an Egyptian population notorious for its high levels of distrust of the Israeli government and people. Moreover, Israel could feel unwittingly challenged. Additionally, actors could leverage the cultural kinship bonds of the Bedouin tribes that permeate the region and are not contained within the borders of one country. An actor seeking to manipulate this situation could perpetuate a red herring attack (deception designed to pit Bedouin tribes against one another) against one tribe, knowing that Bedouin culture and kinship ties would demand retribution. If the event occurred across borders and the actor misled the population as to the identity of those truly responsible for the attack, tribes could conceivably cross the border and incite a conflict that would have the potential for the governments of Egypt and Israel to become involved, with dire implications for the relationship between them.

### IMPLICATIONS

If exploitation is shown successful, trust between Egypt and Israel could decrease significantly resulting in less cooperation between the two countries. This would make for a more divisive region and the levels of unprecedented cooperation between the two countries would revert back to a time in which relations were difficult and uncertain. If the situation worsened, Egypt and Israel would also lose the momentum and relation building that has taken seven decades to achieve. Reduced cooperation would also undoubtedly threaten the stability of the region.

## RISK ASSESSMENT: Egypt-Israel Relations



## FAULT LINE 2: POLITICAL INSTABILITY

The early waves of the 2011 Arab Spring saw tens of thousands of Egyptians flood the streets of Cairo to demonstrate their opposition to the Egyptian government. Though stable, the Mubarak regime was viewed as oppressive, corrupt, and out of touch with Egypt's needs. The Egyptian people demanded a modern president who represented the people. Mubarak's resignation in February 2011 began a period of frequently, and often undemocratically, changing national leadership and shifting security policies that arguably persists to this day, fostering perceptions of governmental illegitimacy. This has created leadership and security vacuums across the country, but especially in Sinai which has historically been a low priority for the Egyptian government.

**GCKN assesses that continued political instability, generated from leadership turmoil, mounting security concerns, and insufficient efforts for economic development may lead to an exponentially dire security situation and direct and violent challenges to the government.**

### ONGOING LEADERSHIP INSTABILITY

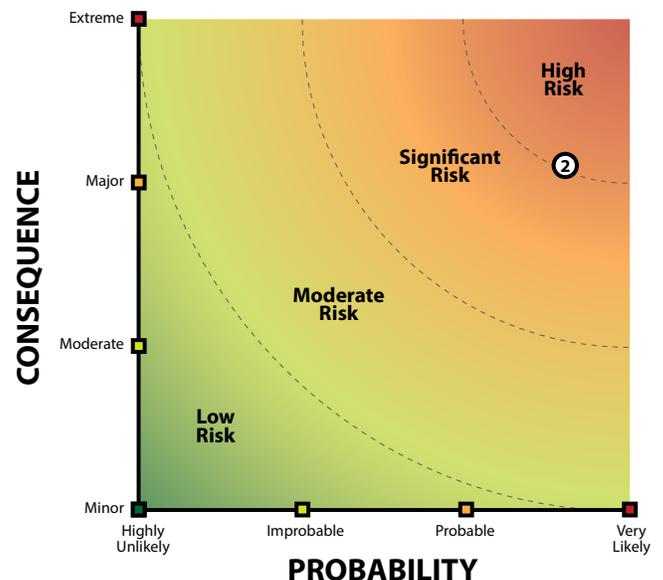
Egypt has struggled to maintain continuity since Mubarak's resignation. Immediately after Mubarak's ouster, a military council was installed to manage the country until a civilian government could be elected. In June of 2012, Egypt's first democratically-elected president, Mohamed Morsi, took office. His tenure was marked by presidential decrees used to expand his powers and to create a new Islamist-friendly constitution, a move that sparked controversy and significant opposition throughout the country. As a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Morsi's leadership was influenced by the ideology of his party. However, only one year after he took office in June of 2013, fourteen million people took to the streets to protest Morsi's policies. After repeatedly and unsuccessfully advising Morsi to heed popular will and moderate his policies, the Egyptian military removed him from power. For a year, the country was led by an interim president until Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was elected president in 2014. Al-Sisi, not unlike Mubarak, had a long history in the military. He served in the Egyptian military for thirty-seven years and ended his career as the Minister of Defense, equitable to the Commander in Chief, in 2014.

Prior to 2011, Egyptian presidents held the office for lengthy tenures (see Figure 2). While not indicative of a thriving democracy, the long presidential tenures created a degree of stability in government. Since 2011, four men have served as Egypt's highest office—either formally or temporarily—and no president has remained in office long enough to provide stability for the Egyptian government and its policies. This has caused questions of legitimacy to plague the people's perceptions of their government. Al-Sisi has held the office the longest since Mubarak's resignation, which could signal stability, but his presidency has been fraught with security concerns and perceptions of illegitimacy based on his leadership of the very military that ousted Morsi, thus reducing whatever stability is granted by his tenure.

### CONSEQUENCES OF INCONSISTENT STRATEGY

The recent instability of the national government and its changing leadership has resulted in the deteriorating security state of the peninsula. Under Mubarak's regime, Egypt was a police state. Under Morsi's rule, the police state apparatus, arguably ineffective in some ways, was allowed to crumble and the security situation in Egypt worsened. This caused the Sinai Peninsula to descend into what has been described as "total lawlessness."<sup>24</sup> After al-Sisi took office, he reinvigorated the police state in an effort to regain control of the Sinai, and has actively engaged the military in efforts to eradicate behaviors deemed a threat to national security. Al-Sisi's government

## RISK ASSESSMENT: Political Instability



tactics are viewed as oppressive by many in the Sinai and include removing political opposition through banning political organizations and holding mass trials. His government is also responsible for “disappearances,” cracking-down on Non-Governmental Organizations’ freedom within the country, and controlling the media through imprisonment of journalists and bloggers. Arrests for suspicion of opposition activity are commonplace and gathering to protest government policies is risking harm and even death at the hands of the state police.<sup>25</sup> Al-Sisi’s efforts to control the population and stamp-out opposition have exacerbated an already tenuous security situation during the four presidencies of the last six years.<sup>26</sup>

The Egyptian government’s sense of security is challenged by the threat of opposition, as well as mounting insurgencies and extremism in the Sinai Peninsula. Al-Sisi’s coercive tactics are portrayed by his government as a means for protecting Egypt against radical Islamists. However, critics argue his tactics only serve to aggravate the weak security situation and actually motivate new insurgents to join the radical Islamist cause.<sup>27</sup> Al-Sisi’s brutish tactics have created an environment with little to no sense of security and the government has instituted no means to recover from the devastating blows of military operations nor to (re)develop areas that have been left in ruins.

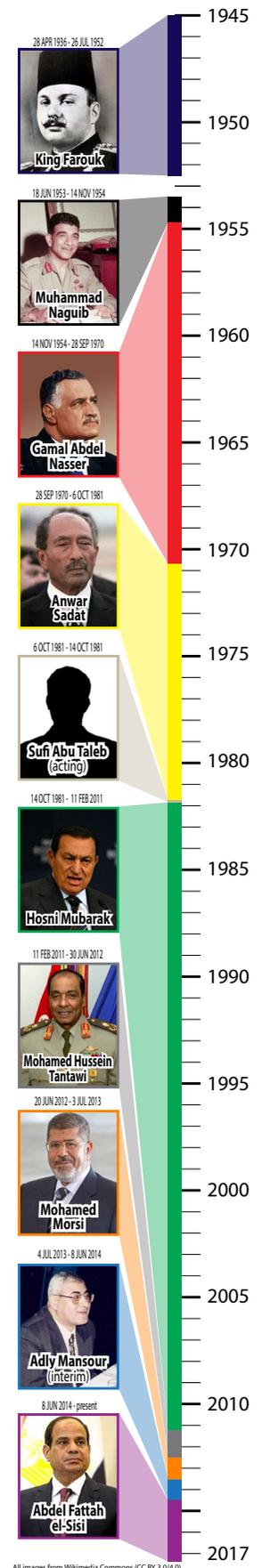
### EXPLOITATION MECHANISMS

The instability of the national government and the resulting disenfranchisement of the Sinai people creates an environment that is ripe for exploitation in the Sinai OE. Actors in the region could exploit this situation by taking advantage of the vacuums caused by inconsistent security policies and implementation of those policies. One means of leverage is by conducting information campaigns aimed at eroding the Egyptian government’s legitimacy even further by highlighting its failures to the Sinai people.

As is typical with ungoverned spaces, the population of the Sinai is likely to turn to any actor in the environment that fills a security or a governance vacuum. A means of leverage could be stepping in to fill these voids by offering safety and protection in exchange for providing support in one manner or another to an organization operating in the region. Another potential means of leverage for this fault line would be the Bedouin culture. Narratives of how the Bedouin are disproportionately impacted by the instability of the government and are of the main victims of the Egyptian police state may be propagated to play on the Bedouin kinship ties and trigger an honor-bound response against the Egyptian government.

### IMPLICATIONS

If unabated, political instability will cause the security situation in Sinai to worsen as a result of exploitation. Without political stability and subsequent coherent security policy implementation, the Sinai Peninsula will only become a larger base for cultivating and harboring Islamic extremism. The population is vulnerable, distrustful of the Egyptian government, and susceptible to the influence of actors that promise them a better situation. At best, the Sinai will continue as a space for threat actors to prosper. The population, with no incentive to support government goals and often suffering collateral damage of security operations, may simply elect to not cooperate with the government’s efforts in the region, thus giving threat actors the safe haven needed to operate freely amongst the population resulting in a continued threat to regional stability.



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Figure 2. Egyptian presidents.

### **FAULT LINE 3: POLITICAL ALIENATION**

Years of neglect combined with more than a decade of Israeli occupation has created an environment where the people of the Sinai feel politically disenfranchised, indignant, and desperate. They are disconnected and feel like they have very little to no agency with the national government.<sup>28</sup> The political alienation of the Sinai is a result of three primary factors: identity issues, formal marginalizing political policies, and formal discriminatory economic policies.

**GCKN assesses that years of neglect combined with a decade of Israeli occupation has created an environment where the Sinai people feel politically disenfranchised, indignant, and desperate and this puts the population in a vulnerable position to be influenced by external stakeholders.**

#### **THE SINAI IDENTITY**

The Sinai people experience significant identity issues. These issues are due to historical negligence and discrimination by the Egyptian government and compounded by the fact this area has experienced 15 years of Israel occupation and many years of conflict. The Sinai Peninsula accounts for only six percent of Egypt's total landmass and less than one percent of its total population, which Egypt's government has historically elected to neglect in social, political, and economic development efforts.<sup>29</sup> Governmental neglect has created an environment where the population has become detached and has even disidentified with the state. Disidentification is worrisome because it leads to an insular state that opens the people of the Sinai to independent agency and/or attachment to alternative identities.

The Sinai people—already plagued by a weak national Egyptian identity—became part of a territory controlled by Israel during the 15 year occupation from 1967 to 1982. While the Sinai officially reverted to Egyptian control in 1979 and the last Israelis withdrew in 1982, the Egyptian government has shown little regard for the Sinai people and as a result there has been no attachment to a national Egyptian identity. Instead, the identity of the people of the region developed from its local tribal and ethnic identities.<sup>30</sup> The Bedouin, or Bedu, are the predominant ethnicity of the Sinai, making up nearly seventy percent of the population. These semi-nomadic Arabs identify

*Disidentification is worrisome because it leads to an insular state that opens the people of the Sinai to independent agency and/or attachment to alternative identities.*

culturally and linguistically more closely with the Arabs in present-day Gaza and Israel than with the people of mainland Egypt. Absent of government interaction, support and ultimately influence, the region is devoid of any kind of national identity, thus contributing to a sense of “otherness” and alienation for the population of the Sinai from Egyptians west of the Suez Canal.

#### **POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION**

The Egyptian government enacted formal policies and practices explicitly designed to politically marginalize the Sinai population, effectively removing any agency the population might have as citizens of Egypt. This includes institutionalized barriers to a representative government and general participation in political life.

Barriers to a representative government for the Bedu start at the level of the governorate, where each governor is directly selected by the President. The governors in turn appoint tribal chiefs rather than letting the local tribes select them. Additionally, rather than using a merit system for choosing military officers from the Sinai, the national government hand-picks the region's military officers, and the Bedu are generally not considered. Further, Bedu are denied access to high-level government and military bureaucracy jobs and are also blocked from serving in lower-level positions within the police and peninsular peacekeeping force. This effectively excludes them from all aspects of political and security management of their own region.<sup>31</sup>

The Sinai people, like most Egyptians, are confronted with an incredibly weak political society. Effecting change in Egypt through traditional political mechanisms is nearly impossible, especially under the al-Sisi regime. His government is not only “actively hostile to the very notion of independent political life,” it has sought to “cultivate a civilian political sphere that would serve as an obedient supporter of government policies.”<sup>32</sup>

The government uses the excuse of defending the state against radical Islamists as justification for its controlling political engagement and strong-arm security tactics in the Sinai. The consequence of the pervasiveness of Egypt's security apparatus and the tactics it has taken in the Sinai has been described as essentially the "neutering of civilian political life."<sup>33</sup>

### LIMITED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY<sup>ix</sup>

The identity issues and a sense of "otherness" of the Sinai people are exacerbated by the systemic discrimination of government economic policies that either explicitly target or explicitly neglect the Sinai. The Egyptian government has historically regarded the people of the Sinai, in particular the Bedouin, with suspicion.<sup>34</sup> This suspicion has manifested in institutional discrimination and disenfranchisement from economic opportunity with the result of the Bedu being treated as second-class citizens.<sup>35</sup> Official government policies were, and are, designed to control and disempower the Sinai people, "preventing them from owning land, subjecting them to invasive scrutiny, and limiting any developmental projects" in the region.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the lack of development in the north, an area where most Bedu reside, communicates a lack of importance and significance to the North Sinai residents which only further aggravates their alienation and intensifies the need for support elsewhere.

The convergence of these three conditions has resulted in little to no agency in political life, thus making the Sinai people a disenfranchised collective. Most concerning, their disenfranchisement makes them vulnerable to outside actors. These actors will undoubtedly fill the vacuum and make promises of political, economic, and social support.

### EXPLOITATION MECHANISMS

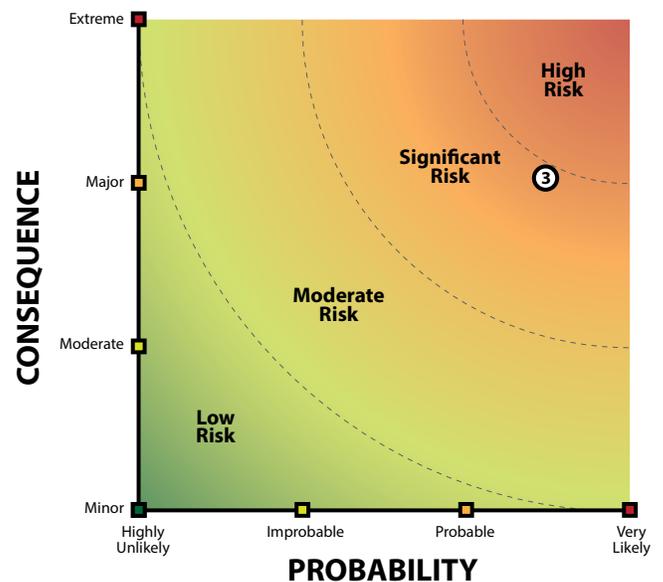
The political alienation of the Sinai people is a condition ripe for exploitation. The vulnerability and frustrations of the Sinai population can be leveraged through information campaigns that target the marginalized and highlight how the Egyptian government perpetuates the sense of "otherness" amongst the Sinai people generally, and the Bedouin in

particular. It can also be exploited by providing needed financial opportunities for the Bedu that support the extremist objectives—which would only metastasize the support networks. Moreover, narratives of Egyptian ethnic discrimination against the Bedouin can tap into cultural kinship ties and elicit further alienation from the Egyptian government and perhaps towards a more attentive alternative.

### IMPLICATIONS

If political alienation worsens as a result of exploitation, the security situation in the Sinai will worsen as Islamic extremists take advantage to grow and become entrenched in the region. The population, already disenfranchised, with little to no "Egyptian" identity and plagued by a sense of "otherness," is susceptible to the influence of actors—both rhetorically as well as with material support. When bad actors have the interest and willingness to fill this void, the Egyptian state's influence only continues to weaken. As mentioned earlier with political instability, the Sinai will be, at best, an ungoverned space that serves as a safe haven for threat actors. At worst, exploitation could result in expansion of threat actors in the region; a threat not only to Egypt but to regional stability.

## RISK ASSESSMENT: Political Alienation



ix This condition, while an important part of the Political Alienation Fault Line, is also directly related to Fault Line 4: Economic Deprivation; see this fault line for more details on economic opportunity in the Sinai.

#### **FAULT LINE 4: ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION**

Economic deprivation of the Sinai Peninsula is an active fault line that can be attributed to Egyptian government economic policies based on longstanding ethnic discrimination. This discrimination targets the population in the Sinai and, to a lesser extent, the Bedouin behaviors that reinforce the bigotry of ethnic Egyptians and culturally prevent some degree of economic stability.

**GCKN assesses that a lack of economic opportunities, discrimination against the Bedouins for rightful employment, and the growth of an illicit economy fosters an ideal operational environment for insurgent activity.**

#### **BACKGROUND**

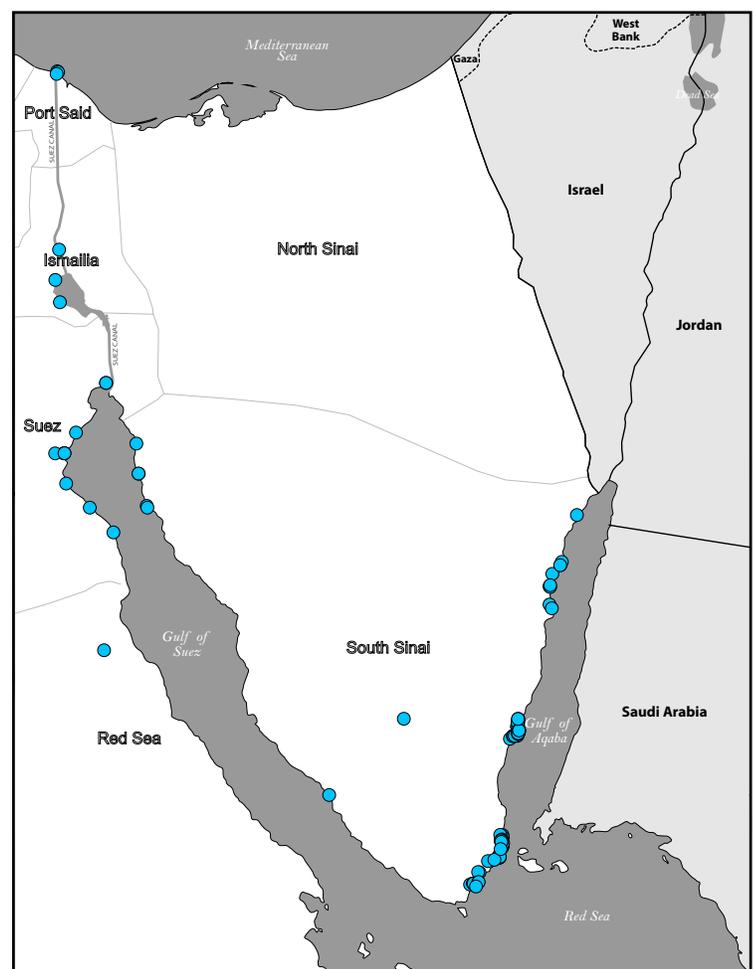
The Sinai was a longtime economic wasteland of Egypt that mainly served as a buffer zone between the Egypt of the lush and relatively prosperous Nile valley and the rest of the Middle East. Sparsely inhabited by Bedouin tribes and sparsely vegetated, the Sinai was an economic afterthought until the negotiations of the Camp David Accords spurred the Egyptian government to launch a massive tourism infrastructure development as part of the plan to deter future Israeli conquests.<sup>37</sup>

Before development in the 1980s, Bedouins mainly lived a semi-nomadic pastoral existence, with some profitable agricultural ventures in the mountains and along the Mediterranean coast. This tradition of nomadic pastoralism was strongly tied to the Bedouin identity.<sup>38</sup> Bedouin traditional way of life was initially interrupted by the Israeli occupation after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, when the Israeli government instituted population and resource control measures, including relocations and economic and social assistance programs.<sup>39</sup> The Israeli occupation arguably was the beginning of the end of the traditional Bedouin life.

#### **DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION**

Egyptian tourism development after 1982 initially offered more profitable livelihoods, but

government economic policies effectively excluded the Bedouin from sharing in the benefits.<sup>40</sup> These exclusionary policies stemmed from long-held bigotry by ethnic Egyptians against the Bedouin. Egyptians as a whole reject the notion of assimilation of the Bedou population, believing that the Bedouin are “not really Egyptian,” and are “uncivilized and unskilled.”<sup>41</sup> This view is bolstered by the traditional semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle of the Bedouin and their earned reputation as smugglers. Ironically, the Bedouin consider themselves Egypt’s only real Arabs, view ethnic Egyptians as Arabized Africans, and do not consider themselves, or Sinai, as Egyptian.<sup>42</sup> Already regarded as second-class citizens due to their ethnicity, the Bedouin population was further “stigmatized as collaborators of Israel’s fifteen-year occupation of the peninsula after the 1967 war.”<sup>43</sup> This “otherness” has created long standing grievances among the Bedou against the Egyptian government of political alienation and economic deprivation.<sup>44</sup>



**Figure 3. Sinai resort locations.**

The Bedouin population in Sinai began growing rapidly during the Israeli occupation due to overall improved quality of life, in spite of the relocations and shift in lifestyle.<sup>45</sup> To ensure total “Egyptian” control over the region, development was accompanied by “Egyptianization” through relocating hundreds of thousands of Egyptians to Sinai from the Nile Valley, with their different Arabic dialect, culture, and historical background.<sup>46</sup> Cairo offered “these internal migrants preferential access to land, irrigation, and jobs,” while denying native Bedouins such basic services and rights as running water, land rights, access to services, and natural resource management.<sup>47</sup> Most important economically, Bedouin were increasingly shut out of the resorts in the south which are “the economic lifeblood” of the Sinai. Over three million tourists are expected each year, accounting for more than one-third of the national total and for nearly 11 percent of Egypt’s GDP.<sup>48</sup>

*This “otherness” has created long standing grievances among the Bedu against the Egyptian government of political alienation and economic deprivation.*

In addition to being excluded from the tourism industry, the Bedouin “were blocked from jobs with the police, army, and the peninsular peacekeeping force, the Multinational Force & Observers (MFO), which is one of the region’s largest employers.”<sup>49</sup> Former sources of employment for Bedouin in the “industrial complexes on the Suez coast, including petroleum, manganese, mining and quarrying” have dried up due to corruption and preference for ethnic Egyptians, leaving only low paying menial jobs for Bedouin.<sup>50</sup>

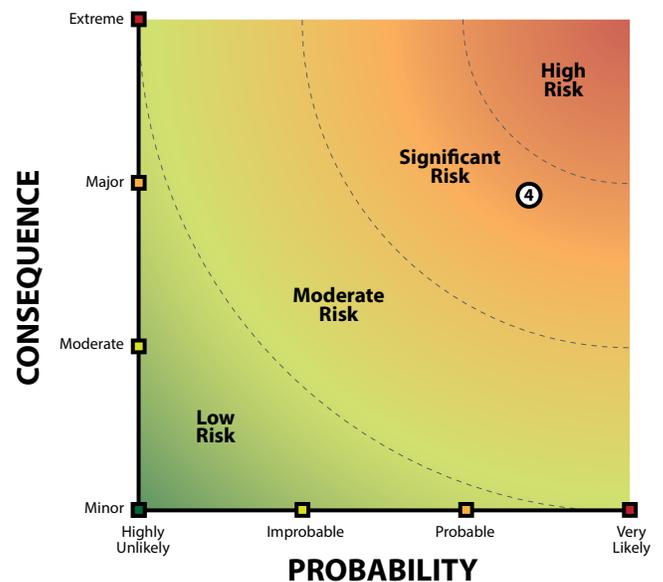
### EXPLOITATION MECHANISMS

The economic deprivation of the Sinai people is a condition suitable for exploitation. Actors in the region could exploit economic deprivation by offering alternative sources of income. An illicit economy already exists in the region. Actors have an existing system and can effectively influence the population to either directly contribute to, or indirectly support, this economy. Additionally, actors could conduct information campaigns to target those most economically at risk in the peninsula, the Bedouin, in an effort to recruit marginalized groups to operate on their behalf.

### IMPLICATIONS

Economically deprived populations fuel extremist support networks and allow for continued operations. If economic deprivation is exploited by actors in the Sinai, the peninsula will continue to foster insurgent activity and serve as a safe haven for extremist groups. The population, economically deprived and disenfranchised, is desperate for economic opportunity. This desperation leaves the population vulnerable to actors with the ability to fill the economic vacuum. A black economy will continue to grow and foster in this vacuum and growth of this economy has the potential to not only facilitate the growth of extremism in the region, but also threaten the stability of the relationship between Israel and Egypt. The flow of arms and people into and out of Israel will continue to create frustration for both nations. Egypt can only allow these activities to continue to the extent they impact their relations with Israel. Thus this could shift the security threat from the Sinai to another OE effectively threatening Egypt and Israel’s tenuous peace. This would have serious ramifications for regional stability.

### RISK ASSESSMENT: Economic Deprivation



## Conclusion

These fault lines, while presented in this assessment as distinct conditions, are neither mutually exclusive nor are they isolated to the Sinai. In fact, they are inexorably intertwined, in ways between Egypt, Israel, and the Sinai Peninsula. The convergence of the fault lines in the Sinai OE, what has in essence become an ungoverned space, creates an environment extremely vulnerable to insurgent interests.

The issues related to faults within the Egypt-Israel relations and political instability, are prevalent throughout the state of Egypt, not just in the Sinai Peninsula. Both also operate at different levels within the OE. Relations are felt at both a macro level (between states) and an individual level (as it relates to population trust). Political instability is realized at both the state level, as an operational limitation and an individual level, as a legitimacy concern for the people in the Sinai. It is the convergence of these two faults, along with the geography of the peninsula that exacerbates the disidentification problem. Systemic neglect and abuse become prominent concerns with the political alienation and economic deprivation faults. This very personal level of disdain only creates disenfranchisement opening up segments of the population to vulnerable influence. It is essential to understand the conditions creating the faults, the escalation that results from them operating at the same time, and the potential effects for continued insecurity and ultimately instability in the region.

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