

**EGYPT: FRESH ATTACKS IN THE NILE VALLEY
DEMONSTRATE THAT TOURIST SITES ARE BECOMING
PRIORITY-TARGETS FOR LOCAL TERRORIST GROUPS**

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The terrorist attack prevented in Luxor on June 10 and the following statements released by IS-affiliated groups threatening the touristic sites exemplify what is becoming the new terrorist strategy aiming to strike the economy of Egypt. Terrorist organizations seem to realign their actions and deploy new cells in the south of the country, especially in the Nile valley that used to be considered over the past decade as a relatively safe area. Through this strategy IS-affiliated groups set a new priority target and try to open a new front establishing new operative cells in the south. Egyptian jihadists are now turning toward so-called 'soft targets' that provide a broad media effect and risk to cause long-term consequences for the national economy.

To recall, terrorist attacks that hit Egypt over the past 2 years almost on a daily basis mostly targeted security forces and were mostly located in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula, namely the town of Sheikh Zuweid, El-Arish and Rafah, the hotbed of the IS-affiliated terrorist group Wilayat Sinai (former Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis).

In June 2015 for the first time since 1997, touristic sites located in the Nile valley were targeted by terrorist attacks:

On June 10, the Luxor archeological site was targeted by an armed assault, perpetrated by 3 armed men who attempted to storm the site of the Temple of Karnak. An Health Ministry spokesman said 4 Egyptians were wounded in the attack. Security sources confirmed that casualties included bazaar shop owners and police officers while no tourists were wounded in the attack.

The attack, which received an important coverage in media, was, in fact, the second attempt of terrorists within one week to target Egyptian touristic sites in the Nile valley. One week earlier, on June 03, 2 gunmen on a motorcycle shot dead 2 members of Egypt's tourism and antiquities police force on a road near the Giza pyramids in the western outskirts of Cairo. The incident happened about 30 meters from a security checkpoint leading to the tourist site.

Until the present moment the attack against Luxor archeological site has never been claimed. Meanwhile, it triggered an active campaign, launched by IS followers in

Twitter, where they called for the beginning of an operation called “burning summer” and urged other “lone wolves” in the country to target touristic sites during this time. These terrorists claimed also that IS will set a new terrorist cell, “Wilayat El Said” to launch attacks against touristic sites. “El Said” is a name used to refer to the southern Egypt. The terrorist group Wilayat Sinai already claimed at end of April on its Twitter account the creation of this new Wilayat aiming to target the south of the country. Abu Khattab al-Masry, allegedly a member of the IS in Egypt, called to form new terrorist cells to target Western tourists.

The establishment of a new IS wilayat in the Nile Valley, one of the most important economic hubs of Egypt, would mark an alarming trend for the security of the whole region. Since the ousting of Mohamed Morsi the IS ‘headquarters’ in Egypt was located in the North Sinai. The group launched numerous terrorist attacks in the region, targeting mostly security authorities. Meanwhile these guerilla-style attacks had very weak media impact and, on the contrary, they provoked a number of military raids in the area and resistance from the Tarabin tribes, the largest Sinai’s Bedouin community who announced their intention to join the fight against the terrorist groups alongside the security forces.

In February 2014 Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis released a statement warning tourists to leave Egypt and threatened to attack any foreigner who stayed in the country after the deadline of February 20. The group also claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing on February 16, which killed 2 South Korean tourists and an Egyptian bus driver in Sinai Peninsula. The threat was considered serious and many countries issued travel warnings with recommendations for their nationals to avoid non-essential travels to the region due to a high risk of terrorist attacks.

These latest attacks against touristic sites, clearly demonstrate the dramatic deterioration of security in the Nile Valley. Perpetrators of these attacks remain unknown but involvement of Wilayat Sinai in the incident remains very likely given the statements released by the groups few days later and threatening touristic sites. Moreover the modus operandi of the Luxor attack proves that it was well-prepared and an operational terrorist network could be behind it. Many security experts agree that the operational mode of the attack allows considering that it was perpetrated by an Islamic State affiliate group.

If terrorist groups in the Sinai Peninsula already demonstrated their intention to attack tourists since the ouster of the President Morsi, no touristic sites located in the Nile valley has been hit by an attack. The Karnak incident is the first to target tourist attractions in the area since the Luxor massacre on November 1997 that left 58 people dead.

It is important to notice that the Luxor attack happened on the same day of an economic meeting set in Sharm el-Sheikh by African leaders, presenting a strong signal to potential investors in Egypt. Indeed, tourism industry represents one of the most important parts of Egypt's economy, with approximately 14 million tourists by year, and provides revenues of nearly \$12.5 billion. This sector employs about 12% of Egypt's workforce and contributes to more than 11% of GDP.

Similarly to Tunisia, Egyptian jihadists are choosing the tourism sector as a ‘soft target’ that provides a large media effect and risks to provoke long-term consequences for the national economy, further destabilizing the situation in the

country. In order to achieve this objective, IS-affiliated groups need to redeploy and take roots in the southern region and especially in Nile valley.

While the establishment of a new IS Wilayat El Said in the Nile Valley so far is just a matter of speculations and suggestions, the modus operandi of the Luxor attack has already proved the existence of a terrorist network able to perpetrate complex coordinated attacks in the region. In this context, further attacks against tourist sites risk to erupt in the nearest future despite important security measures, introduced by Egyptian security authorities in a move to provide maximum protection to one of the main sources of revenues for the economy of the country.

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