

EGYPT'S SINAI QUESTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Terrorism returned to Egypt in 2004 after an absence of seven years with successive attacks and the emergence of a heretofore unknown movement in Sinai. The government's reaction essentially has been confined to the security sphere: tracking down and eliminating the terrorists. Egyptian and international NGOs have focused on the human rights violations which have been prominent in police procedures. The media have been preoccupied with whether al-Qaeda was responsible. Both the state's response and wider public discussion have been confined to the surface of events and have ignored the socio-economic, cultural and political problems which are at the heart of Sinai's disquiet. The emergence of a terrorist movement where none previously existed is symptomatic of major tensions and conflicts in Sinai and, above all, of its problematic relationship to the Egyptian nation-state. Unless these factors are addressed effectively, there is no reason to assume the terrorist movement can be eliminated.

Sinai has long been, at best, a semi-detached region, its Egyptian identity far from wholly assured. Under Israeli occupation from 1967 to 1982, it has remained under a special security regime mandated by the 1979 peace treaty, which significantly qualifies Egypt's freedom of military action. Its geo-political situation – it comprises the whole of Egypt's frontier with Israel and with the Palestinian enclave of Gaza – makes it of enormous strategic significance to both Egypt and Israel and sensitive to developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The population of approximately 360,000 – some 300,000 in the north, 60,000 in the south – is different from the rest of the country. A substantial minority is of Palestinian extraction, even if often Egyptian-born; the rest, labelled "Bedouin", are longstanding natives of the peninsula. The Palestinian element is extremely conscious of its identity and ties to the populations of Gaza and the West Bank. The Bedouin (only a small minority are still tent-dwelling nomads) also possess a distinct identity. Very aware of their historic origins in Arabia and belonging to tribes which often have extensive branches in Israel, Palestine and Jordan,

they, like the Palestinians, are naturally oriented eastward rather than toward the rest of Egypt. Neither Palestinians nor Bedouins have any share or interest in the Pharaonic heritage common to the populations (Muslim and Christian) of the Nile Valley.

These identity differences have been aggravated by socio-economic development promoted by the authorities since 1982. The government has not sought to integrate Sinai's populations into the nation through a far-sighted program responding to their needs and mobilising their active involvement. Instead, it has promoted the settlement of Nile Valley migrants, whom it has systematically favoured, while discriminating against the local populations in jobs and housing in the north and in the rapid development of tourist enclaves (for Egyptians as well as internationals) in the south. These developments have offered scant opportunities to locals and often have been at their expense (notably with regard to land rights), provoking deep resentment. The government has done little or nothing to encourage participation of Sinai residents in national political life, used divide and rule tactics in orchestrating the meagre local representation allowed, and promoted the Pharaonic heritage at the expense of Sinai's Bedouin traditions.

Thus, beneath the terrorism problem is a more serious and enduring "Sinai question" which the political class has yet to address. Doing so will not be easy. Since this question is partly rooted in wider Middle East crises, above all the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a definitive solution depends on their resolution. But the solution also requires the full integration and participation of Sinai's populations in national political life, which means it is also dependent on significant political reforms in the country as a whole, which are not at present on the horizon.

While a comprehensive solution of the Sinai question cannot be expected soon, the government can and should alter a development strategy that is deeply discriminatory and largely ineffective at meeting local needs. A new, properly funded plan, produced in consultation with credible local representatives and

involving all elements of the population in implementation, could transform attitudes to the state by addressing Sinai's grievances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Egyptian Government:

1. Prepare, in consultation with community leaders, the private sector and donors, a comprehensive social and economic development plan for Sinai which:
 - (a) deals with the region as a whole;
 - (b) takes account of the socio-economic interdependence of the north and south; and
 - (c) eliminates all criteria and procedures that discriminate against the local population.
2. Promote the participation of local communities and their genuine political representatives in development decision-making for Sinai.
3. Facilitate and encourage the building of local capacities (e.g. local associations) by simplifying political and administrative rules and targeting government grants and loans to equip such associations.
4. Provide Bedouin communities with the tools to formulate and implement local development projects, notably by organising training courses.
5. Acknowledge Sinai's distinct cultural and linguistic traditions as part of Egypt's national heritage and fund projects that preserve them.

To the Egyptian Political Parties:

6. Establish or, where already present, develop and extend a presence in the region by recruiting members from the local populations and providing orderly channels for expression of their particular needs and grievances.

To Egypt's International Partners:

7. Recognise the danger that the Sinai question, if untreated, may pose to Egypt's stability in the medium term and encourage and assist the authorities in the conception, financing and implementation of a new special development plan for the region.

Cairo/Brussels, 30 January 2007

EGYPT'S SINAI QUESTION

I. INTRODUCTION

On 7 October 2004, three bombs exploded in Taba, Ras Al-Shaytan¹ and Nuwayba' seaside resorts in South Sinai, near the border with Israel, killing 34 people.² On 23 July 2005, Sharm al-Shaykh was targeted, and around 70 died, mainly Egyptians. On 14 August 2005, two roadside bombs hit a passing bus belonging to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), in North Sinai, on the border with Gaza, slightly injuring two Canadians. On 24 April 2006, Dahab, a seaside resort in South Sinai, was hit by three bombs, killing nineteen and injuring nearly 90 Egyptian and foreign tourists. Two days later, the MFO was again targeted, near al-Gourah, on the border with Gaza, although there were no international casualties.

After an absence of seven years (1997-2004), terrorism has returned to Egypt.³ The three operations in Taba, Sharm and Dahab were similar in method: the use of multiple car bombs against civilians. The carefully prepared attacks were initially and hastily attributed to al-Qaeda, but for a long time it was an open question who actually bore responsibility. Following a confused investigation, the authorities announced that all were carried out by a previously unknown Egyptian group, *Tawhid wa Jihad* (Oneness [of God] and Struggle), whose members include Bedouin and men of Palestinian origin from North Sinai, specifically the al-Arish district.

Intriguingly, all three main attacks took place on or around symbolic dates in Egyptian history. 6 October is the anniversary of the army's crossing of the Suez Canal in the 1973 war; 23 July commemorates the 1952 revolution; 24 April is the eve of the anniversary of Israel's 1982 withdrawal from Sinai and coincides with the *Sham en-Nessim*⁴ holiday.⁵ This, together with the high number of Egyptian victims,⁶ provides reason to consider how the attacks may be linked to the question of Sinai and its population in relation to the nation as a whole. Another aspect – the terrorists' identity – compels examination of what the Sinai region is today, 25 years after its return to Egypt, following fifteen years of Israeli occupation and a history painfully affected by conflicts in the Middle East.

¹ Ras Al-Shaytan is located between Taba and Nuwayba', where Bedouin camps for tourists (mainly Israelis) recently have been established.

² Twelve Israelis were killed and over 120 wounded in the Taba and Ras Al-Shaytan attacks.

³ And not only in Sinai: on 7 April 2005, a bomb exploded in the tourist quarter of Khan al-Khalily, in Cairo, killing two French tourists and an American. On 30 April, again in Cairo, in an incident that was probably connected (the perpetrators were from the same neighbourhood), a man threw himself from the 6 October bridge behind the Cairo Museum and was killed as he exploded a home-made bomb, injuring eight. An hour later, his sister and fiancée fired on a bus of Israeli tourists near the Citadel, then killed themselves.

⁴ *Sham en-Nessim*, a holiday that dates from the time of the Pharaohs, is celebrated by all the country's religious faiths.

⁵ The significance of the dates was not lost on the Egyptian press; "The guessing game", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 27 April-3 May, 2006.

⁶ Fourteen of the eighteen killed at Dahab were Egyptians, the others being German, Lebanese, Russian and Swiss. *Ibid.*

II. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE SINAI TERRORIST ATTACKS

In the days following the Dahab attack, the police intensified their operations to hunt down and arrest members of *Tawhid wa Jihad*. Its leader, Nasr Khamis al-Mallahy, was killed on 9 May 2006, while his fellow fugitive, Mohammad Abdallah Aliyan Abu Garir, surrendered. His statement, at a hearing before the prosecutor of the Isma'iliyya National Security Court at the beginning of July, and the confessions of other members captured by the police during the successive waves of arrests after October 2004, partially illuminate a confused investigation that entailed thousands of arrests in Sinai and the killing of dozens of organisation members. The official police version highlighted two major elements: first, that the attacks were executed as part of the same plan by *Tawhid wa Jihad*; second, that this organisation had links with Palestinian Islamist organisations.

More precisely, Palestinians were said to be implicated in training members in Gaza and Egypt. Two of the men responsible for the Dahab bombs are alleged to have been trained in Palestine, three Palestinians are alleged to have trained members in Egypt, and a telephone connected to the Palestinian network (and \$1,000) was found on a suspect arrested in May 2006.⁷ Invoking these facts, the authorities claimed that a link existed between the terrorist organisation and the Palestinian movements, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The Palestinian Authority, which had promptly condemned the Dahab attacks,⁸ argued that the only possible connection was between individuals and was based on family and tribal ties.⁹

No public demand or statement was issued, either before or after the terrorist attacks in Sinai, leaving the incidents completely open to speculation.¹⁰ But if indeed there was a "Palestinian connection", it was in Egypt that it was first established. While of Palestinian origin, the organisation's main leader, Nasr Khamis Al-Mallahy, and one of the men

responsible for the Taba attack, Iyad Sa'id Salih, were Egyptian-born.

There is good reason to believe the first attack, at Taba, was linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (if not necessarily the work of a Palestinian faction). Located within a stone's throw of Israel, the resort is a favourite destination of Israeli holiday-makers, and many of the victims were Israelis. However, a large majority of the victims in subsequent attacks were Egyptian nationals.¹¹

Some put forward the hypothesis that the Sharm al-Shaykh and Dahab attacks were the organisation's revenge for the thousands of arrests after the Taba attack.¹² This, it was claimed, would explain why they targeted the Egyptian civilian population (assuming the terrorists intended to kill Egyptians).¹³ Others saw the Sharm attack in particular – irrespective of its victims' nationalities – as a blow at (or message to) President Mubarak, given the resort's role as the main venue for summit conferences and the president's frequent personal use of it. The theory that the attackers wanted to send a message to Mubarak received additional support from the Dahab attack. As was widely reported, the main establishment bombed was the Al Capone restaurant in the town centre.¹⁴ What was not reported is that its owner was a prominent

¹¹ A single Israeli was among those injured at Dahab.

¹² This thesis was put into circulation by a mysterious "Martyrs of the Sinai Brigade" in its (unconvincing) claim of responsibility for the Sharm attack, *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 25 July 2005.

¹³ According to Garir's confession, the objective was "to kill Israelis and Americans in revenge for Palestinian victims of the intifada. It was not the intention to harm other Muslims", *al-Masry al-Youm*, 29 July 2006 (quoting the transcript of the hearing given to the accused by the prosecutor of the National Security Court, convened under the State Emergency Law). That the accused, in an Egyptian court, denied they deliberately targeted Egyptians is not surprising, but leaves unexplained why Egyptians were a clear majority of the victims in both the Sharm and Dahab attacks. In the former, moreover, a bomb exploded in the old town of Sharm al-Shaykh, which is less frequented by Western tourists than the very modern town in Naama Bay, where the other attacks occurred. Since all seventeen fatalities in Old Sharm were Egyptian, this would tend to support the theory that Egyptians were being deliberately targeted, unless one assumes that the bomb exploded accidentally or prematurely.

¹⁴ "Pools of blood in Egypt blast", BBC News, 24 April 2006; "Bombs kill at least 23 in Egyptian resort town" and "Leaders condemn Egypt blasts", *The Guardian*, 25 April 2006; "Egypt resort suicide attacks kill 18", Agence France-Presse, 25 April 2006. The Egyptian press reported that the first bomb to explode was at the Al Capone restaurant, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 27 April-3 May 2006.

⁷ This was reported in the Egyptian press on the basis of Ministry of the Interior communiqués. "From Sharm al-Shaykh to Palestine" and "Explosive confessions about the Sinai terrorist attacks", *Al-Ahram*, 29 May 2006; *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 24 May and 3 June 2006.

⁸ Agence France-Presse, 26 April 2006.

⁹ *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 3 June 2006.

¹⁰ See "Who is behind the Sinai terrorist attacks? A terrorist organisation... Al Qaeda... the Bedouin... or foreign secret services?", *Al-Musawwar*, 5 May 2006.

local supporter of the president's election campaign in August-September 2005.¹⁵

More generally, the suggestion that the attacks were in some way directed against Egypt and Egyptians (rather than, for example, Israelis or Western tourists) was prominent in Egyptian media commentary.¹⁶ The hypothesis that Egyptian civilians were deliberately targeted at least arguably undermined the claim that al-Qaeda was responsible¹⁷ and raised the question of the status of Sinai and its population in the Egyptian state framework in that the attacks could be interpreted as an expression of "separatist sentiments among the people of Sinai with regard to the rest of Egypt", as Abdel Latif Al-Menawy put it in *Al-Ahram*. Calling for vigilance against those who want to divide the nation (by implication, Israel), a recurrent theme of Egyptian commentary, he insisted that "Sinai is an integral part of Egypt and the Bedouin are sons of the Egyptian nation".¹⁸

The insistence on this point reveals how problematic Sinai's integration has been since Israel's withdrawal. The way in which the population of the Nile Valley perceive the Bedouin of Sinai is still largely coloured by the legacy of the wars in the peninsula. The Sinai attacks have led to a more nuanced view of the little-

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews and observations, Dahab, 24-30 April 2006. The proprietor of the restaurant arranged for large posters supporting President Mubarak's candidacy to be displayed in the district, which simultaneously publicised the restaurant; they were still on display at the time of the attack in April 2006.

¹⁶ The Council of Ministers on 24 July 2005 issued a statement declaring that the attack had been directed at Egypt and its economy, *Al-Ahram*, 25 July 2005. Following the Dahab attack, a former head of state security, Fouad Allam, remarked that, unlike the jihadi movements in the Nile Valley in the 1990s (i.e. *Tanzim al-Jihad* and the *Jamaa Islamiyya*), the group responsible for the Sinai attacks was "choosing locations and times when it is mostly locals and Egyptian tourists who are around", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 27 April-3 May 2006.

¹⁷ This claim was energetically propounded by Israeli analysts and media but, if Egyptian civilians were deliberately targeted, this arguably would put into question direct involvement of al-Qaeda. The doctrine of *takfir* (condemnation of something or someone as un-Islamic and so a licit object of jihad) espoused by al-Qaeda is limited to states, not populations. The much broader conception of *takfir al-mujtama'* (condemnation of an entire society as un-Islamic), which provided the doctrinal basis for the wholesale massacres of civilians perpetrated by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria in the mid-1990s, was formally repudiated by al-Qaeda, which severed its links to the GIA for this reason. See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°29, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page*, 30 July 2004.

¹⁸ *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 27 April-3 May 2006.

known and widely stigmatised Bedouin, but they are still seen by some Egyptians as traitors for collaborating with the Israeli occupier, as well unpatriotic opportunists engaged in all kinds of trafficking (drugs, women and arms), who work with Israeli tourists and may now be terrorists.

A. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE INVESTIGATION

The few scraps of information available on the Sinai terrorist attacks should be treated with caution. The press, the main source, publishes only what the authorities allow. The death of the alleged leader of *Tawhid wa Jihad*, Nasr Khamis Al-Mallahy, and the arrest of Arafat Uda, considered the number two after the police in September 2005 killed Khalid Al-Masa'id, founder of the group with Al-Mallahy, seem to have decapitated the organisation. About 30 other alleged members were arrested in May and June 2006 in the culmination of a long and particularly violent investigation that resulted in fifteen deaths in those months, confrontations with the police in the Al-Arish region and dozens of arrests (thousands since October 2004). All direct participants in the operations as well as its alleged leaders were killed, either during the attacks themselves or during the police campaigns. The reconstruction of events has been based on confessions of alleged members, a few of whom participated indirectly.

The arrests and interrogations have been widely denounced by human rights organisations. In the days after the Taba attack, Human Rights Watch and Egyptian groups estimated that 3,000 had been arrested in the Al-Arish, Shaykh Zwayd and Rafah regions and detained for several months without judicial investigation.¹⁹ Testimony reveals the use of torture during interrogations.²⁰ North Sinai was placed under a quasi-state of siege and roads were closely controlled. After the Sharm and Dahab attacks, the press reported thousands of arrests, and Egyptian human rights organisations expressed serious concern.²¹ However, it was impossible to estimate arrests or

¹⁹ The violence and scale of the arrests among the male population provoked a mobilisation of women in the Shaykh Zwayd, Rafah and Al-Arish districts. On 11 December 2004, mothers, wives and sisters of prisoners went to Cairo, where they were welcomed by the Journalists Syndicate to testify about the situation. "Nord-Sinai, les femmes au combat", *La Revue d'Egypte*, January-February 2006.

²⁰ "Egypt: Mass Arrests and Torture in Sinai", Human Rights Watch, February 2005.

²¹ *Aqamat 'arabiya*, 27 April 2006.

conduct field investigations, as had been possible after the Taba attack, because “people were afraid to talk and give evidence”, according to Ahmad Seif El-Islam, head of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre and a defence lawyer in the Taba trial.²² He said the arrests announced by the police were well below the true figure. These mainly targeted North Sinai,²³ where all members of the organisation were from, but there were also arrests in the south.²⁴

B. TAWHID WA JIHAD

The only available information on the terrorist network comes from suspects statements. According to these, the attacks were carried out by Bedouin and others of Palestinian origin who belonged to a network created after the beginning of the Iraq war. They numbered about 40, and their names indicate they are from the main tribes and families of the north of the peninsula (Sawarka, Masa'id, Tarabin).

The organisation was founded by Khalid Al-Masa'id and Nasr Khamis Al-Mallahy. Al-Masa'id, a dentist from Al-Arish and the prime suspect for the Sharm al-Shaykh attack, was killed by the police in September 2005. Al-Mallahy, a law graduate, was sought by the police after the Taba attack and was among fifteen defendants in a trial that began in February 2006 and concluded on 30 November.²⁵ Born in the Delta of

Palestinian parents, he was a neighbour of Al-Masa'id in Al-Arish and is said to have been an intelligent young man who abandoned his studies to work on a farm. He assiduously attended a mosque in the Shaykh Zwayd region, where the sermons called for jihad, the use of all means to change society, resistance and solidarity with the Palestinian and Iraqi people.²⁶

According to a court statement by one of those accused of the Taba attack,²⁷ *Tawhid wa Jihad* considered the Egyptian rulers and the police to be impious, proclaimed tourism and Pharaonic antiquities to be forbidden and described visits to antique sites as idolatry.²⁸ Al-Mallahy and Al-Masa'id recruited young people in the environs of Shaykh Zwayd, an agricultural district with endemic unemployment, where even the most basic infrastructure is deficient or non-existent and proximity to Palestine is not only a matter of geography, but also of family, tribal, linguistic and economic connections.

Beyond the conjectures concerning the Sinai attacks and given the investigation's lack of transparency, it is dangerous to try to reconstruct the details, even in general terms. However, the Bedouin and Palestinian identity of the members of the terrorist organisation offers a starting point. Specifically, it leads to consideration of what is generally called “the Sinai question” and highlights four main aspects of the case:

- ❑ the specificity of this region of the Egyptian frontier which, historically and sociologically, has looked towards its neighbours to the east rather than the Nile Valley;
- ❑ the heterogeneous nature of the region's population, including the Palestinians, who live and circulate there and have historical, family, economic and linguistic cross-border links;

²² Crisis Group interview, Ahmad Seif El-Islam of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre, Cairo, 29 July 2006.

²³ Crisis Group visited Shaykh Zwayd and its environs at the beginning of June 2006, a few days after a police operation, which ended with the arrest of suspected members of the organisation and the death of seven people. The population was still in shock and did not dare to talk openly. Not a single household escaped police control after the Taba terrorist attack, with night raids conducted by several dozen officers in armoured cars. However, it appears the investigations into the Sharm al-Shaykh and Dahab attacks were more targeted and involved the use of a network of informers among the local population. This change was widely reported in the press, which cited the “collaboration of certain local tribes”, a claim confirmed to Crisis Group by local sources.

²⁴ On 15 May 2006, the daily paper *Al-Hayat* reported, without citing sources, 3,000 arrests after the Dahab attack, including 2,000 in South Sinai, *Al-Hayat*. In the south, a few kilometres above Dahab, the tiny village of Abu Gallum did not escape the arrests. Access to the village, home to about 30 families of Bedouin fishermen, is by track or on foot, along the coast. Three people have been in detention since April 2006, without judicial investigation. Crisis Group interview, Abu Gallum, Dahab, South Sinai, June 2006.

²⁵ Three defendants received death sentences; ten others received prison sentences: two of life, two of fifteen years, three of 10 years, two of seven years and one of five years.

Reuters, 30 November 2006. Al-Mallahy, who was killed by police on 9 May 2006, was tried and sentenced in absentia.

²⁶ “Leader of the military wing of ‘Tawhid wa Jihad’, the terrorist... Al-Mallahy”, *Al-Ahram*, 6 May 2006. The journalist of this national daily asked those close to Al-Mallahy: “How did this young man, a law graduate, become an armed militant? How was he able to prepare and organise the three terrorist attacks at Taba, Sharm and Dahab?”

²⁷ The trial of fifteen people implicated in the Taba attack opened in February 2006. The defence was conducted by lawyers from Egyptian human rights organisations, mainly Ahmad Seif el-Islam, director of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre. Crisis Group interview, Ahmad Seif el-Islam, Cairo, 27 July 2006.

²⁸ *Al-Hayat*, 1 June 2006, citing police sources.

- the brutal context of the border with Gaza, despite Israel's evacuation of its forces in August 2005, at which point Egyptian and Palestinian police and European monitors assumed responsibility for border control; and
- the fact that these actions were carried out by men from North Sinai and targeted seaside resorts in the south, a strategically important region for tourism which in the 1990s escaped *Jamaa Islamiyya* violence in the Nile Valley.²⁹ In other words, these actions highlight social and economic inequality between the north, one of Egypt's poorest governorates, and the south, where private investment and donor aid are concentrated.

These elements illustrate the region's complex social and political realities and show that recent events cannot be reduced to an ephemeral affair of recalcitrant Bedouin and a few isolated Palestinians. They are linked to the geopolitical situation and implicitly reveal how difficult it has been for Egypt to integrate a border region that, demilitarised since 1982, has been a theatre of war and peace for more than 50 years and has for much longer been a crossroads of international political, military, strategic and economic significance for the construction of the Egyptian nation.

III. SINAI'S PROBLEMATIC INTEGRATION INTO EGYPT

A. FROM THE BRITISH OCCUPATION TO THE CAMP DAVID AGREEMENT

With an area of 61,000 sq. kilometres the Sinai peninsula extends from the Mediterranean coast to the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba. A frontier province, at the junction of Africa and Asia, it has always been a strategic buffer between the Nile Valley and Egypt's eastern neighbours.³⁰ It is described in Arabic as a key space (*muftah*) in its most literal sense.³¹

During the reign of Mohammad Ali in the first part of the 19th century, control of Sinai was a bone of contention from the moment Egypt began to assert its autonomy from Ottoman domination by building a centralised state and defining its borders. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 placed the region at the centre of manoeuvres by European powers to control trade between the Red and Mediterranean Seas. In 1906, the British, who had imposed their mandate over Egypt since 1882, obtained the official unification of the peninsula with the Egyptian *wilaya*³² and the definition of the border with Palestine.³³ Sinai was then administered by the British army.

In many respects, however, the Suez Canal remains the real eastern border of Egypt, with Sinai a semi-detached region whose territorial status is defined by geo-strategic circumstances. Between 1949 and 1967, Sinai and the Gaza Strip were under Egyptian military administration. The difference between the two was that Egypt claimed and exercised sovereignty over Sinai, and this was universally recognised, whereas it never claimed sovereignty over Gaza, where its administration was supported by the first United Nations peacekeepers (the United Nations Emergency Force, UNEF) from November 1956 to June 1967, as provided for by the accords that ended the 1956 Suez crisis. The 1967 war and Egypt's defeat confirmed the strategic stake represented by Sinai on both sides of

²⁹ Between 1992 and 1997, the Nile Valley suffered a wave of attacks targeting tourists, government representatives and Copts. The government, supported by the private sector and donors, invested massively in South Sinai, which accounted for around a third of eight million foreign tourists in 2005. In mid-1997, members of *Jamaa Islamiyya*, most of whom were in prison, signed an agreement to cease violence. The Luxor attack, in November 1997, was unanimously condemned and signalled a definitive end to terrorist operations. See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Briefing N°13, *Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt's Opportunity*, 20 April 2004.

³⁰ See the map in Appendix A below.

³¹ The expression is especially used by the Egyptian geographer Gamal Hamdan, in *Sina* [Sinai], (Cairo, 1982).

³² *Wilaya* here is the official term for a province of the Ottoman Empire, which Egypt formally remained.

³³ Na'um Shuqayr, *Tarikh Sina* [The History of Sinai] (Beirut, first edition 1906, reprinted 1991). The author worked for the British military administration and was stationed in Sinai for several years.

the peninsula, which was then occupied by Israel for fifteen years.

The Camp David Agreement, which was concluded in September 1978 and followed in March 1979 by a formal peace agreement, put Sinai at the centre of negotiations and of the normalisation of relations between Israel and Egypt. It was thereafter, for Egypt, an issue of reconquest and national affirmation, disconnected from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The long and difficult diplomacy to recover the Taba enclave revealed Egypt's tenacity as it sought to determine national boundaries.³⁴ The peninsula was demilitarised and occupied by a Multinational Force and Observers (MFO),³⁵ which began its work on 25 April 1982, the day Israeli troops withdrew from Sinai. The MFO is regularly denounced as an American force by the Egyptian opposition, especially the Islamists.³⁶ However, since August 2002, the U.S. gradually has reduced its personnel; from a majority in 1983, the number has fallen by almost half.³⁷

Administratively, the peninsula is divided into two governorates of roughly equal area, on an east-west axis, with locally elected councils and executives, like Egypt's 26 other governorates. At the top, two governors are appointed from among army generals, like almost all Egyptian governors. However, on the military and security fronts, the region is under a special regime, divided into four zones along a north-south axis and provided with means of control as limited by the international Camp David Agreement:³⁸

- Zone A: a strip of territory to the east of the Suez Canal running north-south, where Egypt

is authorised to station a 22,000 strong infantry division.

- Zone B: central Sinai, where four battalions reinforce the Egyptian police.
- Zone C: to the west of the border with Gaza and Israel, along the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba as far as Sharm Al-Shaykh, the MFO and Egyptian police are responsible for control. The MFO has a base in the north, at Al-Goura, and a second in the south, near Sharm Al-Shaykh.
- Zone D: a narrow strip on the east side of the Egyptian-Israeli border, where Israel may station four infantry battalions, including along the Gaza border.

B. BORDER CONTROL

Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip reopened the question of Egypt's control of its eastern frontiers and more broadly of the Sinai region. The 28 August 2005 Israel-Egypt agreement allows the latter a contingent of 750 military (rather than police, the only forces allowed there previously), with which to control the border with Gaza along the fourteen-kilometres. Philadelphi Road.³⁹ This prompted protests from some members of the Israeli Knesset, including opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who saw it as entailing the "remilitarisation" of Sinai, in violation of the 1979 accords.⁴⁰ In Egypt, the agreement was in line with the authorities' demands for increased resources to control the border zone, which they made in response to criticism about the slowness of the investigation into the terrorist attacks.⁴¹ Moreover, since the beginning of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000, Israel has regularly

³⁴ The Taba enclave was returned to Egypt on 18 June 1989.

³⁵ The MFO (in which ten countries participate: the U.S., Fiji, Colombia, Uruguay, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, France, and Italy) is composed of approximately 3,000 military and civilian personnel. The force and 1,900 observers are presently under the command of a Norwegian officer. The U.S., Fiji and Colombia provide the majority of the soldiers, including an infantry battalion each manning remote sites, see <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/mfo.htm>. Egypt, Israel and the U.S. contribute the bulk of the annual \$51 million budget, see www.mfo.org.

³⁶ In 1994, such accusations earned Adel Hussein a month in prison. He was chief editor of *Al-Sha'ab*, the newspaper of the (Islamist) Labour Party. Paper and party have both been banned since 1999.

³⁷ "I do not believe that we still need our forces in the Sinai. And we're working carefully with our friends and allies in Israel and Egypt to see if there isn't some reasonable way that...we can modestly reduce some of those folks that are down there in the Sinai", Donald Rumsfeld, January 2002, quoted in <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/mfo.htm>.

³⁸ See the map in Appendix B below.

³⁹ *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 1-7 September 2005.

⁴⁰ According to Yuval Steinitz, Chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs & Defence Committee, the move returned "the Egyptian military to the land, air and sea of the eastern Sinai. It doesn't matter that it is a relatively small force. It is a vital strategic mistake The opening shot [of a war] is very important. Israel doesn't have any strategic depth, so the question of your army sitting 150 kilometres from the border or 15-kilometres from the border is very significant." *Jerusalem Post*, 25 August 2005 and *Ahram Weekly*, 1-7 September 2005.

⁴¹ The military forces were limited to zone B and were not able to intervene in zone C to support the police. The hunt for the terrorists took place essentially to the south of al-Arish (zone B), as far as Rafah (zone C).

pressed Egypt about arms smuggling and the movement of suspected militants across the border.⁴²

Israeli military officers have cast doubt on the efficacy of the arrangement. Despite Egypt's enhanced border forces, they say smuggling activities through an extensive tunnel network have only marginally been affected. An Israeli military intelligence official estimated that, in 2006, 30 tons of explosives crossed into Gaza,⁴³ together with technical expertise⁴⁴ and many millions of dollars.⁴⁵ Of the 100 consultants Egypt had maintained in Gaza, he said, only two remained on a permanent basis.⁴⁶ To explain alleged Egyptian security lapses, Israelis cited insufficient human intelligence; suspected bribery, especially among low-level soldiers;⁴⁷ and lack of political will.

⁴² “[Former] Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) chief Avi Dichter reported that nineteen tons of explosives have been smuggled into the strip through the Rafah area, the Egyptians doing little if anything to prevent this”. “The Loose Ends of Israel’s unilateral withdrawals”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 October 2006.

⁴³ In November 2006, Shin Bet director Yuval Diskin claimed that 33 tons of military-grade high explosives, 20,000 assault rifles, 3,000 pistols, six million rounds of small arms ammunition, 38 long-range Qassam missiles, twelve shoulder-fired, anti-aircraft guided missiles, 95 anti-tank rocket launchers, 410 anti-tank rockets and twenty precision-guided anti-tank missiles had been smuggled into Gaza since the disengagement. “Behind the Headlines: The Threat to Israeli Civilians from the Gaza Strip”, Israeli Foreign Ministry, 21 November 2006.

⁴⁴ “Iran and Hizbollah are sending experts to build a south Lebanon in Gaza with a ballistic ability, anti-aircraft systems, and fortified defences to meet an Israeli invasion”. Crisis Group interview, Israeli military intelligence officer, Jerusalem, January 2007.

⁴⁵ The Rafah agreement makes no provision for personal financial transfers, although Israel is seeking to draft amendments for possible renewal of the agreement in May 2007. Crisis Group interview, foreign ministry official, Jerusalem, January 2007.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Israeli military intelligence officer, January 2007.

⁴⁷ “Some of the officers in the field are bribed by the Islamist movement and the Palestinian Authority. When you earn \$120 per month and someone offers you thousands, it’s tempting”. Crisis Group interview, Israeli military intelligence official, Jerusalem, January 2007. Western diplomats told Crisis Group of instances of Gazans crossing into Egypt by tunnel only to be met by an Egyptian customs officer seeking payment. Crisis Group interview, Jerusalem, December 2007.

1. The Rafah bottleneck

Since the destruction of the Yasser Arafat International Airport early in the second intifada,⁴⁸ the Rafah terminal has been the main way of leaving and entering Gaza, and its opening depends on Israel’s permission, with often dramatic humanitarian consequences. In August 2004, Egyptian public opinion was aroused by the plight of approximately 9,000 Palestinians, stranded on the Egyptian side for three weeks. Eight died during this period.⁴⁹ Although Israeli troops and settlements were evacuated at the end of August 2005 and border control left to the Palestinians and Egyptians, the Rafah border crossing was closed again, on 7 September, on Israeli orders. On 12 September, a breach was made in the border wall, while the Egyptian authorities were requesting an explicit agreement on the administration of the Rafah terminal. For one week, thousands of Gaza residents entered Egypt without border controls to visit their friends and family but also to stock up on petrol and other commodities.⁵⁰

As noted, 70 EU customs officers (the European Union Border Assistance Mission Rafah, EU BAM), acting in support of the Palestinian police, have monitored the Rafah terminal since November 2005.⁵¹ Theoretically, Israeli personnel are no longer physically present but they control the movement of people and monitor their identity through a centralised surveillance and information system, and convey objections to European monitors.

The opening and closing of the terminal remains unpredictable, and incidents have become more common. In January 2006, two Egyptian officers were killed and 30 soldiers wounded during clashes with alledged

⁴⁸ Yasser Arafat International Airport in Rafah was heavily attacked by Israel in 2001-2002 and is no longer operational.

⁴⁹ The press estimated that 5,000 Palestinians were stranded in Cairo, 2,500 at al-Arish and 1,500 at Rafah. The general secretary of the North Sinai governorate, al-Sayed Qotb, said this was the fifth time in one year that the crossing point had been closed indefinitely. Interview in *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, 10 August 2004.

⁵⁰ “Cinderella in Rafah”, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 22-28 September 2005.

⁵¹ The EU monitors were introduced as a result of the 15 November 2005 Israeli-Palestinian Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA), reached with U.S. mediation. Its scope is to “provide a Third Party presence in the Rafah Crossing Point in order to contribute, in co-operation with the European Community’s institution building efforts, to the opening of the Rafah Crossing Point and to build up confidence between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority”. The EU monitors operate on the Palestinian side only.

members of the Palestinian Al-Aqsa brigades, who were trying to take control of the crossing point.⁵² Starting on 25 June 2006, the Israeli operation "Summer Rain" in the Gaza Strip left several thousand Palestinians stranded on either side of the frontier, in critical sanitary conditions which resulted in several deaths.⁵³ On 14 July 2006, Palestinians made another breach in the wall, allowing several hundred people to cross the border. On 11 August, the Rafah terminal was reopened for several hours in the Gaza-Egypt direction.⁵⁴ Thousands waited for several days on the Palestinian side while Palestinians had been ordered to leave the Egyptian side by the end of July; others were stranded in transit at Cairo and Al-Arish airports. Supplementary controls on the Al-Arish-Rafah road prevented them from reaching the terminal. Nobody could enter Gaza; foreigners were turned back if not mandated by an international organisation (most employees of such organisations have left Gaza) or holding Israeli press credentials. EU customs officers were fiercely criticised:

They are on duty for one hour each day; they do nothing other than check passports – the same work done by the Israelis, smoking their cigarettes while keeping their eye on the situation. They themselves need Israeli authorisation to get from their base at Kafr Salem to the terminal.⁵⁵

In an attempt to deal with a difficult situation, Egypt in August 2006 deployed 1,300 police on the Palestinian border, in response to militant Palestinians who threatened another breach in the wall to let stranded people cross from the Egyptian side.⁵⁶ On 26

August, the Rafah border crossing was finally opened in both directions, for about ten hours, allowing nearly 7,000 to cross as well as goods, including humanitarian convoys.⁵⁷ From late June to December 2006, Rafah terminal was partially opened for a total of only 33 days.⁵⁸

2. Smuggling at the Egypt-Gaza border

In May 2006, two Palestinian teenagers from Gaza were arrested at the border by the Egyptian police while they were carrying knives and home-made bombs that they intended to sell in Rafah.⁵⁹ For its part, the Israeli government constantly denounces the existence of tunnels for weapons smuggling at the Egypt-Gaza border, and claims to have destroyed dozens.⁶⁰ From individual isolated activities which are regularly reported by the Egyptian press, to wider scale smuggling which implies tight networks between the two sides, the Egyptian-Gaza border has been historically notorious for smuggling since the aftermath of the 1948 war, when it was administered by Egypt. Goods imported into the Gaza Strip were subsequently smuggled across Sinai and into Egypt. Between 1948 and 1967 there was also an active smuggling route between the West Bank and Gaza Strip via Israel, extending into Sinai as well. Smuggling continued after 1967, mainly of weapons from the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in Jordan to guerrillas in the Gaza Strip. This ceased after Black September (the violent showdown between the Jordanian government and the PLO units based in Jordan in 1970).

Smuggling became an issue again after the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in 1982, even more so after the 1993 Oslo agreement, and particularly in recent years with the breakdown of authority in the Gaza Strip. It consists primarily of contraband and weapons from Sinai into Gaza, mainly using tunnels and some coastal access. The smuggling routes into Gaza tend to be controlled by a consortium of families, in some cases acting in close cooperation with factions.

⁵² Al-Jazeera, 5 January 2006; *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 10-18 January 2006.

⁵³ Official sources talk of two deaths: "Two Palestinians die as 1,000 wait at shut Egypt-Gaza border crossing", *Middle East Times*, 15 July 2006. Local networks speak of nine, mainly people travelling to Egypt for medical reasons.

⁵⁴ Al-Jazeera, 11 August 2006; BBC, 11 August 2006.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Afaf Adwan, a Palestinian resident of the U.S., Cairo, 18 August 2006. Adwan had been visiting his family in Gaza since the beginning of June and was among the last of those authorised to cross the border, after spending two days with several hundred people stranded in the Rafah terminal compound. On the European presence at the border crossing, see also the press release issued by the Palestine Centre for Human Rights, "European Union Monitors at Rafah Contribute to the Strangulation and Deprivation of Gaza Strip Civilians", 3 August 2006, <http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/PressR/English/2006/88-2006.htm>. On the general situation in Palestine, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°57, *Israel/Lebanon/Palestine: Climbing out of the Abyss*, 25 July 2006.

⁵⁶ "1,300 Egyptian police beef up Gaza-Egypt border", 21 August 2006, Reuters.

⁵⁷ *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 27 August 2006.

⁵⁸ "The Rafah Border Crossing to Open Nine Hours on Saturday", International Middle East Media Centre, 30 December 2006.

⁵⁹ *Al-Wafd*, 21 May 2006.

⁶⁰ "Israel, over the last few months, has seen some of the negative side-effects of fighting in Lebanon in that there's been a step-up of arms smuggling", said Miri Eisin, spokeswoman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. According to Israeli Defense Forces in October 2006, "fifteen tunnels were destroyed in the past days", cited in "Trouble Sealing Egypt-Gaza Border", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 27 October 2006.

3. The border with Israel

Further south, beyond the Philadelphi Road, control of the border with Israel is perhaps less affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts but it remains problematic. With much of the 230-kilometre border only loosely fenced, the Bedouin tribes which circulate there have a reputation for engaging in all kinds of trafficking.⁶¹ It is in particular a zone of transit for drugs and clandestine migrants and a notorious base for networks bringing women especially from Russia and Central and Eastern Europe to work as prostitutes in Israel. According to a 2004 report by the U.S. embassy in Israel:⁶²

Egypt serves as a country of destination and transit for trafficking victims from Central and Eastern Europe. It has been asserted that Egypt serves as the most common country of transit for trafficking to Israel. Victims are flown to cities such as Hurghada, Sharm Al-Shaykh, and Cairo, from which they are transferred to Israel through the Sinai desert. Women are smuggled in groups, together with goods, drugs, weapons, and migrant workers.⁶³

IV. THE PEOPLE OF SINAI: A MOSAIC OF CONTRASTS

The Sinai populations, generally identified with the Bedouin, are remarkably unknown.⁶⁴ Behind the generic category is a rich diversity. Moreover, the populations cannot be reduced to the nomadic Bedouin alone and share a history of settlement and rich exchanges, reflecting the fact that Sinai is a geographical crossroads.

A. THE BEDOUIN

Historically, Sinai is the land of the *badu*, the people of the desert, mainly tribes that originated in the Arabian Peninsula and the countries of the Levant. Some fifteen major tribes now share Sinai, in territories demarcated and governed by agreements between groups in accordance with customary law.⁶⁵

Among the most important, in the north east, along the Mediterranean coast, are the Sawarka and the Rumaylat. They are settled in the Al-Arish, Shaykh Zwayd⁶⁶ and Rafah districts and their family subdivisions (*'a'ilat*) are extensive. To the west, the majority are the Masa'id, the Bayyadiyya and the Dawaghra. Central Sinai is essentially dominated by the Tayaha, the Ahaywat and the 'Azazma, whose territories extend as far as Israel and the West Bank.

In the south, the majority groups are the Tuwara, a confederation of tribes, including the 'Alayqa, Awlad Sa'id and Muzayna, who live in the Sharm Al-Shaykh region, in the mountains of the interior and especially in the Dahab area. The Tarabin, another important

⁶¹ Four major tribes share the border region, from north to south: the Tarabin, the Tiyaha, the 'Azazma and the Ahaywat.

⁶² See www.protectionproject.org.

⁶³ "Trafficking in Women via Egypt during 2003," Hotline for Migrant Workers, report prepared for the U.S. Embassy, Tel-Aviv, 12 January 2004.

⁶⁴ Foreign researchers in linguistics have been the only people to consider the diversity of the Sinai populations and have produced the best contemporary studies. Rudolf De Jong, *A Grammar of the Bedouin Dialects of the Northern Sinai Littoral: Bridging the Linguistic Gap Between the Eastern and Western Arab World* (Brill, 2000); Clinton Bailey, *Bedouin Poetry, from Sinai and the Negev* (London, 2002). Egyptian interest in Sinai is almost exclusively geostrategic and military; symptomatic is that the best maps are produced by the army and are not widely available. Bedouin culture was only recently included in Egyptian folklore heritage documentation and conservation programs, notably by the Cultnat Centre. Crisis Group interview with Ayman Khoury, project leader at the Egyptian Centre for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (Cultnat Centre), Cairo and Nuwayba', June 2006.

⁶⁵ See map in Appendix C below.

⁶⁶ Leaders and most members of the terrorist organisation *Tawhid wa Jihad* met and/or came from Shaykh Zwayd district.

group historically and in terms of Sinai presence, are at Nuwayba' but above all in the north, in an area that extends as far as Israel and the West Bank. The Jibaliyya were described in legend as originally from Valachie, in Romania, sent to Sinai by the Ottomans to ensure security. They converted to Islam and are now identified as Bedouin but maintain their identity through attachment to the monastery of St. Catherine and control over the district (and the tourist routes).

It is difficult to estimate the number of Sinai Bedouin. Press figures are generally unreliable, sometimes as high as 200,000, from a total population that is now for the peninsula approximately 360,000.⁶⁷ Most who are called Bedouin have long been settled as farmers, fishermen, but also traders, civil servants, tourist guides and hotel owners. Nomadism and pastoralism, the principal traditional Bedouin life characteristics, now apply to a minority, among the poorest and most marginalised. They are identified as 'urban rather than *badu* or 'arab',⁶⁸ and are mainly in the mountains or plateaus of the interior, where conditions are particularly difficult. The Bedouin identity is no longer expressed in terms of a specific way of life – nomadism – but in terms of belonging to a group which defines itself as such.

⁶⁷ In the 1940s, Mohamed Awad estimated there were 12,000 Bedouin in the north and between 2,000 and 4,000 in the south. Mohamed Awad, "Settlement of Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Tribal Groups in the Middle East", *International Labour Review*, vol. 79, 1959; quoted by Glassner, Martin, "The Bedouin of Southern Sinai under Israeli-Occupation", *Geographical Review*, vol. 64, n°1, January 1974. Glassner cites statistics produced by the Israeli military Administration in South Sinai, which counted 7,700 Bedouin in 1972. In 1993, a census by the St. Catherine National Park office counted 11,084 Bedouin in a total population of 28,225. However, it did not make clear the conditions of the census or define "Bedouin". Moreover, Bedouin in the national parks were not included. These parks cover much of the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba (Naqb, Abu Gallum, Nuwayba') and the St. Catherine area.

⁶⁸ *Badu* is a generic term meaning "man of the desert". In current usage and depending on the context, 'arab can be synonymous, but necessarily implies a reference to the Arabian peninsula, the Land of the Prophet. In general usage, 'urban is applied to the nomadic Bedouin pastoralists who generally live in tents, traits which distinguish them from other Bedouin who have been settled for several generations. For example, a Tarabin Bedouin, owner of a tourist establishment and member of the town council (public and political office), will present himself as 'arab/badu, emphasising his status as a local notable distinct from 'urban, aware that the image of Bedouin held by his interlocutor is initially associated with nomads of the mountains.

What are understood, very generally, as "Bedouin" are really a mosaic of populations that reflects the complex settlement history of the peninsula, with clear distinctions in terms of origins, traditions, economic activities and even language. The populations of the Sinai can be clearly distinguished from those of the Nile Valley by dialects, which are close to those of the Levant (Palestine, Lebanon) or the Arabian peninsula (Jordan, Saudi Arabia), but which also distinguish the tribes from one another.⁶⁹ Access to strategic resources (agricultural land in the north, tourist developments in the south, water in the mountains and the deserts of the interior), also distinguishes the different groups of Bedouin.

B. PALESTINIANS

The number of Palestinians in Egypt is estimated at between 50,000 and 70,000.⁷⁰ It is also estimated that a third of the population of al-Arish (about 100,000) is Palestinian, although their status and date of arrival are unclear. Palestinians are also well represented in the border towns, such as Shaykh Zwayd and, of course, Rafah.⁷¹

Since 1948, the government has always made sure that refugee camps on its territory do not become permanent. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Palestinian camps of Sallum, on the Libya border, and the so-called "Canada" camp in Egyptian Rafah, were exceptions.⁷² The latter's population, inherited from the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai which cut Rafah

⁶⁹ The linguistic richness of the people of Sinai is explored in De Jong and in Bailey, both op. cit.

⁷⁰ The number was 53,000 in 2000, according to the Palestinian ambassador to Egypt; 50,000 in 2001 according to the U.S. Refugees Committee (USRC); 70,000 according to the Egyptian authorities. Figures quoted by Oroub El Abed, "The Palestinians in Egypt: An Investigation of Livelihoods and Coping Strategies", Forced Migration Refugee Studies Program, the American University in Cairo, 2003, <http://www.aucegypt.edu/fmrs/documents/EnglishReport.pdf>. The author pointed out that the results of the Egyptian 1996 census are not available.

⁷¹ These estimates coincide with those given by local informants Crisis Group met in the field and press reports. No study allows an exact figure for the Palestinian presence in the region.

⁷² Canada Camp population resettlement was monitored by the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), as an exception in Egypt. The UN agency was established in 1949 to take charge of Palestinian refugees in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Gaza. See Ron Wilkinson, "Canada Camp Relocation", a report prepared for the International Development Research Centre, Cairo, May 2001, http://www.dfait-macci.gc.ca/middle_east/peaceprocess/cdacamp_review-en.asp.

in two, was eventually transferred in 2000 to the “Brazil” and “Tell Sultan” settlements in the Palestinian half of Rafah.⁷³ In 2004, Israeli incursions targeted these two zones and demolished houses as part of the plan to construct a buffer zone and protection wall.⁷⁴

The 1948 refugees in Egypt are not under the jurisdiction of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁷⁵ or the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), whose involvement then-President Nasser rejected. Palestinians used to enjoy the same access to property, free schooling, health and employment as Egyptians. Moreover, the Egyptian administration of Sinai and Gaza between 1948 and 1967 greatly contributed to building permanent links between the two peoples, especially as a number of tribes have a presence on both sides of the border. However, the situation of Palestinians was called into question in the 1970s, after the Camp David Agreement and the normalisation of relations with Israel.⁷⁶ By virtue of the 1978 law, Palestinians are

now classed as foreigners.⁷⁷ Beginning with the 1990 Gulf crisis, Egypt has severely restricted entry of Gaza Palestinians; 45,000 Palestinians are estimated to have left in 1995 to work or study in Gaza, while keeping contact with families in Egypt.⁷⁸

C. THE EGYPTIANS OF THE NILE VALLEY

From 1982 onwards, Egypt has considered the Sinai question as above all a matter of population settlement. Increasing the population was the way to control and integrate the peninsula. It is difficult to quantify this process, as there has been no research. The “Egyptians”, as they are called locally (even by themselves), come from the entire Nile Valley, including the Delta and the south. They comprise distinct groups, distinguished by accent and economic activity, most often settled together according to their village or governorate of origin.

For example, in North Sinai, families from Manoufiya (in the Delta) are important. The government greatly encouraged people of this governorate (from where President Mubarak originates) to migrate, including by offering attractive salaries and public sector employment.⁷⁹ The few factories built in the Al-Arish region (mainly mining complexes and two cement factories) provide better-paid jobs primarily for people from the Nile Valley. In the south, settlement grew in tandem with the tourism industry from the 1990s onwards. People from the Nile Valley hold most jobs, mainly in the informal sector, which largely or wholly escape state control and taxation.⁸⁰

D. THE “BOSNIANS” OF AL-ARISH

The final category worth mentioning is a population with a singular history, located at Al-Arish and known

⁷³ This procedure had a coercive aspect, including use of force, but because it was protracted due to political disagreements and lack of financial support, there was little or no resistance.

⁷⁴ In 2002, Israel decided to build a 1.6-kilometre long, and eight metre high wall along the border between Gaza and Egypt, from the Yibneh camp to Salah al-Din, the crossing point with Egypt. The objective was to create a buffer zone along the fourteen-kilometre border with Egypt (the Philadelphi Road), notably by strengthening control over the strip of land between the wall and residential zones. The buffer zone was created by the destruction of hundreds of houses. A two-day military incursion, 12 and 13 May 2004, destroyed 298 houses along the border and resulted in the death of fifteen civilians. Operation Rainbow, 18-24 May 2004, was conducted in the Tell Sultan and Brazil camps, in Rafah, destroying 166 houses and with 32 civilian victims. The town of Rafah is one of the most violent zones in Palestinian territory. Between September 2000 and August 2004, around 400 civilians, including 80 children, were killed by Israeli forces there. Rafah has been split in two since the return of Sinai to Egypt in 1982, “Razing Rafah, Mass Home Demolition in Gaza Strip”, Human Rights Watch, October 2004.

⁷⁵ Less than 200 Palestinian refugees are registered with the Egyptian UNHCR service in Cairo. “A Quarter-Century after Camp David, Palestinian refugees in Egypt face discrimination, say experts”, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 21 June 2006.

⁷⁶ In 1978, the Egyptian Minister of Culture, Yusuf El Sebai, was assassinated by the Abu Nidal group. This event, arguably arising from Palestinian resentment over the Camp David agreement adversely affected Egypt's relations with the Palestinians.

⁷⁷ The status of foreigner deprived Palestinians of access to property (until the 1990s), free school education (they have since had to pay in foreign currency) and health care at public establishments. A 2004 law allowed mothers to pass Egyptian nationality to children with a foreign (other than Palestinian) father. In the face of criticism, the exception clause was finally annulled.

⁷⁸ El Abed, *op. cit.*, p.15.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, residents from Menoufiya who settled in Al-Arish at the end of the 1980s, Al-Arish, June 2006.

⁸⁰ Numerous activities on the margin of the tourism industry enable thousands to make a living, such as taxi drivers, street vendors, undeclared employees (often relatives of the owner) in tourist bazaars, small family enterprises and construction workers.

as the “Bosnians”. In the Ottoman period, a garrison from what is now Bosnia was installed in Al-Arish. Its descendants are still there and lay explicit claim to their ancestry. Beyond the historical facts, this heritage is claimed as the basis of a local “European” identity, distinct from both the Bedouin and the people of the Nile Valley. This discourse about identity employs physical stereotypes, according to which the “Bosnian” (“European”) population has white skin, fair hair and blue eyes, as opposed to the so-called “African” (“Egyptian”) features (curly hair, dark skin).

V. UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL SPECIALISATION

A. DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

The reintegration of Sinai after Israel’s withdrawal was carried out in particular through a voluntarist demographic policy that promoted a high population growth in the 1986-1996 decade. The average annual growth rate for the region as a whole was 5 per cent, but 6.7 per cent in the south compared with 4.7 per cent in the north.⁸¹ However, the population is unevenly distributed, with more than 80 per cent in the north, mainly along the coast. North Sinai had 300,000 in 2002, a third of these in Al-Arish, the governorate capital, South Sinai officially a little over 60,000.⁸²

There is also a high proportion of men to women. In 1996, 62 per cent of the population of South Sinai was male; in the North, 52 per cent was male. There is a simple explanation: the “resettlement” was carried out by exporting mainly male labour. In the north, where the gender ratio is more balanced, the incentives of stable employment and housing attracted families from the Nile Valley. In the south, jobs are mainly generated by tourism and the private sector and so are seasonal and casual. The economically active population is mainly young, very mobile men, usually single. If they are married, they commute between Sinai and their governorate of origin.

More recently (1996-2002), growth rates in Sinai apparently have slowed, with 2.6 per cent average annual increase in the north and 2.2 per cent in the south.⁸³ However, these figures do not take into account the economically active population in the informal sector, estimated at tens, even hundreds of thousands. More than anything, these estimates reveal the dynamism of the service and construction sectors, which are linked to tourism, and the intense labour migration, especially in the south, from the 1990s onwards.

⁸¹ “National Census of the Population”, Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS), 1986 and 1996.

⁸² “Egypt Human Development Report”, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2004; also Egypt Human Development Database, www.undp.org.eg. These official statistics do not take into account those employed in the informal sector, including seasonal workers, who generally declare their residence to be their governorate of origin.

⁸³ “Egypt Human Development Report”, *op. cit.*

These demographic differences combine with striking inequalities between the north, which has some of the poorest governorates in Egypt, and the south, made dynamic by an economy based partly on oil in the Gulf of Suez but above all on tourism, which enjoys the massive support of the authorities, the private sector and donors.

B. SOUTH SINAI

1. Sharm Al-Shaykh and Taba

According to official figures, South Sinai welcomed 2.6 million foreign tourists in 2003, more than a third of Egypt's visitors. Tourism is unquestionably the strategic economic activity in the region's development, based on private sector investment and supported by international development agencies and the government through the Tourism Development Authority (TDA), a powerful official agency.⁸⁴ With only seventeen hotels in 1994, South Sinai accounted for 3.5 per cent of Egypt's tourist accommodations. In 2002, the region had 225 tourist establishments, 57 per cent concentrated in Sharm Al-Shaykh, which recorded more than six million tourist nights.⁸⁵

Sharm Al-Shaykh, originally a Bedouin fishing village, housed the South Sinai military command during the Israeli occupation. Its population (town and surrounding villages) grew from 1,500 in 1986 to 7,500 in 1996, 70 per cent male. Today, the town has an international airport, wide asphalted roads, a modern hospital and expensive infrastructure (desalination and waste treatment plants) to service the international clientele of the integrated tourism complexes which stretch several kilometres along coastlines renowned for their exceptional seabeds.

Oriented from the outset to meeting the demands of European tourists, especially Italians,⁸⁶ Sharm Al-

Shaykh over the last ten years has also become a seaside resort for wealthy holidaymakers from Egypt and the Gulf states. In 2002, 35 per cent of hotel guests were Egyptians, who had a particularly strong presence over holidays and during the summer. In the 1990s, the purchase of a villa or an apartment was a lucrative investment, while time-shares in quality hotels began to be developed for Egyptians.⁸⁷ The standard of living is roughly comparable to Europe, and the town has been literally emptied of local people, at two levels:

- land ownership: during the last fifteen years, all building plots have been allocated to Egyptian and foreign companies investing in tourism, with the Bedouin consigned to the desert through a government program; and
- employment: in 2002, 110 hotels alone created 10,000 to 30,000 direct jobs, most for non-locals; the 250 employees of one five-star hotel are all from the Nile Valley, with the exception of two sailors on the boat staff from Al-Tur, the governorate's administrative capital.⁸⁸

In mid-2005, in a move that symbolised relegation of locals to the economic margins, work was begun on a ten-kilometre wall around the tourist town, to control access and to be made of concrete, one metre thick and 1.5 metres high, with three gates.⁸⁹ A fierce press campaign compelled local authorities to suspend the project.⁹⁰ At the same time, the governor banned the only activities open to Bedouin – offering camel rides to tourists, acting as unofficial guides on trips into the mountains and, especially, holding *soirées* under a tent at night.⁹¹ Now only official tour operators are authorised to organise events in the desert – “Bedouin parties” without Bedouin. Bedouin are no longer

⁸⁴ This public agency was created in 1991 to manage World Bank loans for the environment and infrastructural development in South Sinai and the Red Sea region. Formerly attached to the Ministry of Tourism, it was given particular responsibility for establishing a tourism development strategy in these regions, but above all for distributing land, evaluating and selecting investment projects and, finally, channelling donor aid to the private sector.

⁸⁵ “Tourism in Figures”, Ministry of Tourism, Cairo, 2002.

⁸⁶ The first major tourist complexes in Sharm were built in 1993, on the initiative of an Italian property developer, Ernesto Pretoni. He worked with Italian tourism agencies to promote South Sinai and benefited from a special regime granted by the Egyptian government for foreign investment in the region. *Middle East Economic Digest*, 16 March 1993.

⁸⁷ “Tourism in Figures”, op. cit.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, Mohammad, 27, a graduate in French literature and catering manager from Tanta (in the Delta), June 2006.

⁸⁹ “Un mur d'exclusion” *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, 14 October 2005 and “Sharm builds wire fence to prevent attacks”, *Middle East Times*, 18 October 2005.

⁹⁰ “A mistake that history will not pardon: the construction of a wall (*jidat*) to prevent the Bedouin of Sinai from entering Sharm Al-Shaykh. Twenty million Egyptian pounds taken from the public purse to build this wall”, *Al-Wafd*, 17 October 2005. Use of the term *jidat* implicitly refers to the separation wall under construction in the Palestinian territories. “After the Wafd campaign: half of the Sharm al-Shaykh wall is destroyed”, *Al-Wafd*, 24 October 2005.

⁹¹ “Obscure measures against the Sinai Bedouin ... the governor punishes the Bedouin by banning them from organising parties and desert safaris for tourists”, *Al-Wafd*, 26 October 2005.

allowed to circulate in the environs of Sharm Al-Shaykh with their camels and offer rides to tourists.

At Taba, on the Israel border and the second pole of tourist development in South Sinai, the Egyptian private sector has moved in, operating with the same model of integrated complexes as in Sharm Al-Shaykh. Its development is part of a project for an Egyptian "Riviera" to stretch along the entire Gulf of Aqaba. The road connecting the two tourist towns is being widened. Repair of the inland road to Suez will bring Taba to within five hours from Cairo.⁹²

European and Israeli tourists together are 80 per cent of Taba's hotel guests.⁹³ In line with the policy of international specialisation, the airport, opened in 2000, services exclusively European capitals. The "Taba Heights" complex applies the "gated community" model to the tourist sector (hotels, villas, marina, reconstructed village, golf course). The site belongs to the Orascom Hotels and Development group owned by the Sawiris family who are among the most important entrepreneurs in Egypt.⁹⁴

2. Dahab and Nuwayba'

Between Taba and Sharm Al-Shaykh, two tourist resorts are resisting the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) and the big Egyptian and foreign investment companies. This resistance is one among several signs of the resentment which the development of tourism in Sinai has been provoking.

Dahab ("gold" in Arabic) has never really been a village, nor even a focus for Bedouin settlement. It

was famous for its palm trees, and the mountain Bedouin used to go there during the date harvesting season, in autumn. Today it is a small town, a direct product of the tourism development of the last ten years, with a population around 4,000, including several hundred foreigners, and about 100, mostly medium category hotels. It is a holiday destination favoured by Egyptians and Arabs from the Gulf, who account for 25 per cent each of the tourist clientele.⁹⁵

Nuwayba', with its port facing Jordan and Saudi Arabia, is an international transit point for goods and people to the Gulf countries (emigration and pilgrimage). Its population of 3,000 to 4,000 is composed of civil servants and private company employees, mostly from the Nile Valley. Tarabin, a dozen kilometres to the north, is a tourist zone that developed during the last fifteen years on the initiative of the Bedouin of the Tarabin tribe.

3. Land

In the mid-1990s, the Oslo Accords opened up new economic development perspectives, and tourism became a priority for South Sinai.⁹⁶ The TDA, given responsibility for managing its development in non-urban zones, the coast and deserts, encouraged the private sector to invest by selling land at \$1 per sq. metre. The market, till then regulated by local customary law,⁹⁷ was transformed; most locals found it harder to own land, while a minority benefited from the new situation.⁹⁸ The new procedures encourage particularly intense speculation in real estate, though it is far from simple to obtain a plot and start a project, as the story of a Cairo entrepreneur illustrates.

Encouraged by his first experience in tourism in the region, he decided to buy a plot on the seafront between Nuwayba' and Taba. The TDA initially said it had already allocated the land. The buyer used the

⁹² Crisis Group observations, June 2006.

⁹³ Israeli tourists in Egypt have increased remarkably over the last five years, despite their government's cautions. Numbers grew from 147,000 in 2002 to 340,000 in 2003 and 390,000 in 2004. A possible explanation is that they are choosing Egypt instead of Kenya, a cheap holiday destination popular with Israeli tourists until the terrorist attack in Mombasa, in November 2002. "Tourism in Egypt and the Sharm al-Shaykh attack, First Special Report on the Impact of the Sharm al-Shaykh attack", World Tourism Organisation, Madrid, 11 August 2005, <http://www.world-tourism.org/newsroom/Releases/2005/august/egypt.pdf>.

⁹⁴ The Orascom group, headquartered in the U.S., is a leader in Egypt's mobile phone, construction and tourism markets, also with interests in Africa, the Middle East, (major contracts in Iraq) and Europe (the second biggest Italian mobile phone operator, construction of a hotel complex in Switzerland). It owns the Al-Gouna resort, on the Red Sea north of Hurgada, a model "tourist community" according to its owners, with all the infrastructure of an autonomous town: transport, places of worship, international school, a farm, and food production facilities.

⁹⁵ "Tourism in Figures", op. cit.

⁹⁶ During 1992-1994, the tourism industry in the Nile Valley experienced a serious crisis because of terrorist attacks by Gama'a Islamiyya, particularly in the south. Development of tourism was then concentrated on Sinai and the Red Sea.

⁹⁷ The principle of *wadaa al-yad* (literally "put your hands") gives de facto property rights to a tribe, family or one of its members who settles on virgin land. It is widely used in all areas of the desert but also on the outskirts of the Nile Valley's urban centres, including Cairo, where Bedouin communities formed in accordance with this principle (for example, the Maadi-Helwan zone).

⁹⁸ A plot of land on the seafront at Tarabin might be worth as much as 2 million Egyptian pounds (about \$360,000) in the mid-1990s. Crisis Group interviews, Bedouin landowners in the Nuwayba' region, June 2006.

land registry to show there was no owner and finally obtained title. Eleven owners from tribes in the north and south of the peninsula then claimed ownership, had some palm huts built in a single night in order to occupy the area and sent a few armed men to intimidate the new owner. The latter resisted and, in order to gain full rights, convened a tribal council, first to designate an exclusive proprietor and then to determine the compensation to be paid to him. The Cairo entrepreneur ended up buying the land twice (from the TDA and from the Bedouin). It took him nearly five years to build a restaurant on his property, and he still pays 300 Egyptian pounds (about \$50) a month for “protection”.⁹⁹

At Tarabin, the twenty Bedouin camps in the tourist zone, with palm-leaf roofs, have been replaced by cheap hotels and restaurants, mainly intended for young Israelis, but with permanent, two and three-story concrete buildings that are sometimes air-conditioned. Many new owners are from North Sinai, often from Al-Arish Bedouin families renowned for their business skills.¹⁰⁰ The Bedouin camps have moved out to where the beaches and seabed are still preserved, to areas still coveted by the TDA and the big investment companies for the “Riviera” project. The Dahab region, where the Muzayna tribe is strong, has experienced the same land speculation.¹⁰¹

On the whole, government sale of coastal land to major investment groups during the last fifteen years has pushed local people out of the tourism development zones and closed access to the main source of income in the region. Moreover, settlement programs for the Bedouin have resulted in their gradual abandonment of pastoralism and location around the major centres of urban growth, without allowing them access to jobs generated by tourism.

It remains to be seen whether Nuwayba' and Dahab will follow the same path. Local resistance is still strong. Strategic plots of land are increasingly rare, and it is difficult for the mainly Bedouin owners to move further away. Owners of Bedouin camps to the north of Nuwayba' are trying to coordinate efforts in order to negotiate permanent residence with the TDA

(electricity and legalisation of land rights) and counter the “Sawiris colonisation projects”, in the words of one.¹⁰² This will not happen without tension, even conflict. As long as the government and the private sector do not mount a real drive to acquire the most strategic lots of remaining land, the Bedouin can still continue to be players in the local property market and earn a little of the income generated by tourism. Should they both lose what is left of their stake in the market and remain barred from any significant stake in the new prosperity, the consequences will be deeper resentments and the prospect of serious confrontations.

4. Pastoralism and illegal crops

In the mountains and on the plateaus of the centre and south of the peninsula, herding of sheep, goats and camels has long been the main economic activity. Incentives to permanent settlement, the growing shortage of accessible water and urbanisation, among other factors, have severely damaged this activity, fundamental to Bedouin identity, which in some areas has been replaced by the much more profitable cultivation of poppy and cannabis.

In decline under the Israeli occupation,¹⁰³ prohibited crops reappeared in the 1990s, becoming the target of regular campaigns to destroy plantations. During May 2006, an operation described as “war”, allegedly involved 500 police and military personnel and concluded after ten days with the reported destruction of 450 plantations, three tons of *bango* (a local variety of marijuana) and three million plants.¹⁰⁴

The greatest beneficiaries of these illicit activities are not necessarily the Bedouins, who often are at the bottom of the production and distribution chains. According to the American geographer, Joseph Hobbs:

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, ‘Ashaysh ‘Anayz Tarabin, owner of Kum Kum 3 camp north of Nuwayba’, June 2006. The son of a famous poet, he was an elected member of the local council for years and now works on the project to establish a Bedouin heritage museum.

¹⁰³ Under the Israeli occupation, a policy of providing jobs (1,200 Bedouin were recruited for the South Sinai administration) and payment of wages to tribal chiefs helped reduce the poppy crop. See Martin Glassner, “The Bedouin of Southern Sinai under Israeli Occupation”, *Geographical Review*, vol. 64, n°1 (1974), pp. 31-60.

¹⁰⁴ “*Al-Masa’iya* participates in the biggest operation to destroy drug plantations in Sinai”, *Al-Masa’iya*, 11 May 2006. Nevertheless, Joseph Hobbs highlighted how improbable the official figures were. Hobbs, “Troubling Fields. Opium Poppies in Egypt”, *Geographical Review*, vol. 88, n°1, January 1998, pp. 64-85.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Nuwayba’, June 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interviews, owners of tourist establishments, Bedouin from north and south, Nuwayba’, June 2006. According to a hotel owner from al-Arish and a member of the Sawarka tribe, around 80 per cent of hotel owners in Tarabin are from the North. He acquired his land in 1995, when it was a camp of huts belonging to a local Bedouin.

¹⁰¹ On the complexity of land disputes, “Land claims”, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 21 December 2005.

Not all of the southern Sinai Bedouin grow drugs [and] there are no indications that the growers themselves are rich. A very energetic man may earn up to about \$5,600 a year from poppies, or four times what he would earn if he had reliable legitimate wages.... The typical poppy grower is a male between the age of 20 and 45 who has not been successful in obtaining or keeping a wage-paying job.¹⁰⁵

A Bedouin told Hobbs:

Twenty years ago every able-bodied man had a job. Now, there is no work. The weather is worse – it doesn't rain anymore. The ibex are gone because the people have hunted them out.¹⁰⁶

Poppy is cultivated mainly in the region of St. Catherine's monastery, a centre for religious tourism and the main area of government intervention to protect the environment – since 1996 in partnership with the EU. The program also aims to protect the Bedouins, “a disappearing species” (some 6,500 were estimated to be living in the region in 1996),¹⁰⁷ but above all to control them and eradicate the poppy crop by transforming the region into protected zones reserved for eco-tourism, potentially a generator of jobs and a tourism development fashionable with donors.

5. Environmental issues, eco-tourism and donors

In 1988, the Egyptian environment agency made the St. Catherine's region a protected nature reserve as the first stage of a protection plan for South Sinai. In the 1990s, the EU contributed €23 million to environmental protection programs,¹⁰⁸ including management of four nature reserves (Ras Mohammad, St. Catherine's, Naqb and Abu Gallum), covering 32 per cent of the South Sinai governorate's surface area. In 2005, it launched a new funding phase for the South Sinai Regional Development Program (SSRDP), with a €64 million budget, including €34 million for infrastructure and equipment

and a €20 million grant for local social and economic development projects.¹⁰⁹

The results have been mixed. Donors and the Egyptian authorities seem to have concentrated on St. Catherine's. The vast and spectacular region of Abu Gallum and its “undesirable” Bedouin fishing communities have, in contrast, been abandoned to their fate,¹¹⁰ while Naqb, near Sharm, is increasingly left to private investors, who have formally converted to what is called eco-tourism but often display little respect for the environment.

Procedures for funding the South Sinai development program and its project-selection criteria have been widely criticised. The lack of local civil society organisations (South Sinai has less than a half-dozen NGOs active in local development) means that Bedouin are almost wholly absent from negotiations and the process of selecting projects.¹¹¹ “You have to speak the language of the European Commission”, said Sherif Al-Ghamrawy, a Cairo man who has lived in Sinai and manages the Hemaya Association in Nuwayba'.¹¹² Another well-informed observer said:

Development aid is theoretically allocated to projects in order to strengthen local civil society. However, in South Sinai no local capabilities exist, and international aid only strengthens the hold of central institutions over the region and exacerbates existing inequalities. Funds are

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in *ibid*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁷ Comment by a European Union civil servant, in Joseph Hobbs, “Speaking with People in Egypt's St Katherine National Park”, *Geographical Review*, vol. 86, n°1, January 1996, pp. 1-21.

¹⁰⁸ Saint Catherine Protectorate Development (€6 million); the Oil Pollution Combating Centre at the Entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba (€4.3 million); Gulf of Aqaba Development Programme (€10 million) and the Ras Mohamed Protectorate Development Project (€2.5 million).

¹⁰⁹ “One of the major components of the SSRDP is the implementation of a 20 million Euro Regional Development Grant Scheme (GS), which will support local initiatives in the six development areas: 1) Local Economic Development, 2) Social Development, 3) Cultural Heritage, 4) Public Awareness, 5) Capacity Building, 6) Environment and Sustainable Development”, excerpt from the call to applicants at <http://www.eu-ssrdp.org/>.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, residents of the Abu Gallum village, South Sinai, June 2006. The zone has around 30 families of the Muzayna tribe, living exclusively from fishing and income from a few passing tourists. Because it is a protected zone, however, fishing is now forbidden. Since the Taba and Dahab attacks (the latter site is a dozen kilometres away), no tourist dares to venture into this isolated zone where access is by track or by walking along the coast. The village comprises huts built with salvaged materials and is generally occupied only during the summer. Some families also have a home in the nearest mountain village, Bir Al-Saghayr, at Dahab and Muzayna, near Nuwayba'.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Bruno François, ex-consultant for Arcadis (a Dutch development consultancy, contracted by the EU in January 2006 to prepare projects for the South Sinai Programme), Sharm Al-Shaykh, June 2006.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, Sherif Al-Ghamrawy, Nuwayba', June 2006.

given to those who already have funds, and groups that are already excluded from development are marginalized even further. This immediately raises the question of the responsibility of international donors in the distribution of development aid. There is no system to ensure that the donors' objectives are achieved, let alone procedures to evaluate the results of these projects. Without such measures, it would be better to donate nothing and let Egypt and Sinai manage on their own.¹¹³

While the EU seems to be the main donor in South Sinai, between 1991 and 1993 the World Bank already allocated not less than \$850 million to Egypt and the TDA (created for the occasion), to fund infrastructure and environmental protection projects in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba regions. The concentration of private investment and the involvement of the Egyptian authorities and donors in the south of the peninsula highlight the persistent lack of development in the North.

C. NORTH SINAI

North Sinai is one of the country's poorest governorates, according to basic human development indicators. Although population growth was particularly strong in 1986-1996, this was mainly due to a policy of settlement and encouragement of migration from the Nile Valley. The national development plans for the region have remained wishful thinking, and the migratory trend has been reversed. The objective now, as defined by Hassan Wanane, manager of the executive agency responsible for urban development in the North Sinai governorate, "is to stop the exodus of the governorate's original inhabitants, encourage those who have already left the region to return and transform it into a governorate that can attract people from the Nile Valley".¹¹⁴ This is especially the case in the Al-Arish region, from which young people with irrigation skills for semi-desert environments have been migrating to the big agricultural farms on the desert road between Cairo and Alexandria.¹¹⁵

Fishing and agriculture are the main activities. Industry is limited to a few quarries in the centre of

the region and a dozen factories producing glass, coal, ceramics, cement and food products. Domestic tourism has developed in the last decade, mainly in Al-Arish, which has experienced intense urbanisation on its seafront and in summer welcomes around 50,000 Egyptian tourists on holiday in rented chalets and apartments.

1. Attempts to industrialise

Attempts to industrialise the region are symbolised by Hassan Rateb, a Cairo businessman who controls the main profitable sectors of production¹¹⁶ and whose willingness to export to neighbouring markets is unpopular.¹¹⁷ Local resentment of private investors in North Sinai has to be understood in connection with the national controversy which has been aroused since 2004 by economic agreements between Egypt and Israel, such as the one creating Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs).¹¹⁸

Access to agro-industry jobs is another area of strong local resentment. For instance, the Shaykh Zwayd region, from which most members of the *Tawhid wa*

¹¹⁶ Hassan Rateb, president of the Sinai Investors Association, owns two cement factories which have operated in North Sinai since 1999 and a tourist resort in the Al-Arish region. He is president and majority shareholder of the Al-Mehwar cable television network and established the first (private) university in Sinai.

¹¹⁷ The output of these factories is alleged to have contributed to the construction of the separation fence in the West Bank; local rumours to this effect were fuelled by a corruption scandal in the Palestinian Authority, revealed in mid-2004. Egyptian cement, sold at a preferential price to the Palestinian Authority, had been resold to Israeli construction companies active in building the fence. See "Treason in a time of Struggle", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 29 July-4 August 2004, and "A commission of enquiry into the Egyptian cement affair", *Al-Ayyam*, 31 July 2004.

¹¹⁸ "The agreement is based on U.S. legislation dating from 1996, which provides for 'qualified industrial zones' (QIZ) in which Israeli companies can invest or provide materials toward goods made by Arab exporters. Those goods then receive preferential treatment when entering the United States", *The Washington Post*, 14 December 2004. The agreement, signed in December 2004, applied to textiles and was extended to other areas. For a critical economic analysis, see Amal Refaat, "Assessing the Impact of the QIZ Protocol on Egypt's Textile and Clothing Industry", Egyptian Centre for Economic Study, July 2006, at <http://www.eces.org.eg/Publications/Index2.asp?11=4&12=1&L3=1>. According to a June 2005 agreement, the government is to supply "25 billion cubic metres of Egyptian natural gas ... to Israel Electric Corporation (IEC) over a fifteen-year period, with the option of extending the deal for another five years", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 18-24 May 2006, which reported the deal's estimated value at \$2.5 billion.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, young Egyptian consultant, Sharm al-Shaykh, June 2006.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Hassane Wanane in *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, 2 June 2004.

¹¹⁵ Mustafa Singer, "Significant level of migration by North Sinai citizens to Cairo", *Al-Ahaly*, 14 June 2006 and Crisis Group interview, Mustafa Singer, Al-Arish, June 2006.

Jihad organisation came, is famous among other things for its olive trees. The only olive oil factory is administered by the army, and the jobs are held by non-locals, while agricultural land cultivated by Bedouin and farmers lacks water and basic facilities. The olive oil factory is all the more symbolic of what locals call an "Egyptian occupation (*ihtilal*)" because it is located in the former Israeli settlement of Yamit.¹¹⁹ After Israel's withdrawal, the government said it wanted to rebuild the seaside resort, in what was known as the "Fayrouz" town project. This has not happened but is still cited in Egyptian education manuals as a symbol of the reintegration and development of Sinai. A young primary school teacher in Shaykh Zwayd district told Crisis Group: "We are still waiting for the town of Fayrouz. Imagine my shame when I have to tell the school children about this national project, which has never seen the light of day".¹²⁰

2. The dominance of agriculture and the water problem

The national Sinai development plan for 1994-2017 envisages the development of about 100,000 hectares of agricultural land, thanks to construction of the al-Salam Canal. The aim is to divert part of the waters of the Delta eastwards, which would make it possible to irrigate a strip of land in North Sinai, between the Suez Canal and the frontier, in a project to create a major agricultural zone. Investment was planned to reach 75 billion Egyptian pounds (\$13 billion) by 2017. Until now, according to Hassan Wanane, manager of the executive agency responsible for urban development in the North Sinai governorate, the state has invested 21 billion Egyptian pounds (\$3.7 billion), mainly on infrastructure,¹²¹ but with mixed results. As an Egyptian journalist, Farouk Goweda, remarked:

The Egyptian government has spent millions of pounds to install electricity, build roads, an enormous bridge and the Al-Salam Canal but when all is said and done, the government has not improved the desert land, investors do not use water from the Nile, young people still have no jobs and the people of Sinai have still not seen any real changes in their life.¹²²

In fact, scarcely a third of the canal's planned course has been completed. It irrigates the lands of Qantara as far as Bir Al-'Abd, which is only a quarter of the plan's target area. These irrigated lands are used for intensive agriculture and were acquired by big farmers who, again, mainly employ people from the Nile Valley. The interior and the coast above Bir Al-'Abd as far as the border are still excluded from the policies aimed at promoting agricultural development, which depends on one essential resource: water.

Water is a crucial problem in Sinai. The Al-Arish, Shaykh Zwayd and Rafah region produces mainly fruits and vegetable for the tourism markets of the south but the small farmers depend on a combination of over-exploited groundwater and rainwater, which has been diminishing for some years and mainly falls along the coast. The interior needs new wells. Drinking water is distributed by tanker-lorries in the absence of a piped distribution network.¹²³

The governor of North Sinai, General Ali Hafzy, estimates that 70 per cent of its development is in private hands and stresses the discrepancy between the economic development projects favoured by investors and the region's needs, and the lack of coordination between the private sector and the government policy. "The priority today is human development", he said. For investor Hassan Rateb, the private sector is not interested in North Sinai due to the complex land ownership situation.¹²⁴

In both north and south, land ownership is essentially governed by customary law, applied by Bedouin families that have been urbanised and settled for several generations. Land is held by families in small plots, whose yields could be far greater if conditions were improved (for example, by wells). The social and historical position of these families is a major obstacle to acquisition of land in the north but also gives the families their only access to a local

¹¹⁹ When the Israelis withdrew in 1982 from Yamit, they destroyed all houses and infrastructure (as they did in all Sinai). The remains have not been removed.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Shaykh Zwayd, June 2006.

¹²¹ Interview given to *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, 2 June 2006.

¹²² Farouk Goweda, "Sinai, between development and terrorism", *Al-Ahram*, 6 May 2006.

¹²³ A 60-litre can of water costs around one Egyptian pound (\$0.17) in agricultural regions of North Sinai and up to four Egyptian pounds (\$0.70) in the more remote areas of the south. The drinking water budget for a half-occupied Bedouin camp at Nuwayba' is estimated at 200 Egyptian pounds (\$35) per day. Water has become a major economic issue; some Bedouin own wells and act as exclusive suppliers. In the case of the fishing village of Abu Gallum, north of Dahab, for example, water is transported about twelve-kilometres from a well in the mountains on land that belongs to a family who lives from the income generated by selling water to the village inhabitants.

¹²⁴ See the Friday "Face-to-face" column featuring the Governor of North Sinai and Hassan Rateb in *Al-Ahram*, 5 May 2006.

economic resource in the face of government policies that favour the private sector. The main plank in the platform of Ashraf Ayub, candidate for the leftwing Tagammu party in Al-Arish in the November 2005 legislative elections, was legalisation of land occupied by local people and denunciation of the governorate's practices, which favour non-local private investors regardless of the history and the well-established structure of property rights enshrined in customary law.¹²⁵

3. EGYPTIANISING SINAI, SETTLING THE BEDOUIN

After 30 years of attempts to develop Sinai, perceptions of the region remain largely determined by security and military considerations, all the more so after the terrorist attacks. For example, the *Al-Wafd* newspaper wrote that a regional agricultural development strategy would provide "not only a goldmine", which some private investors would monopolise, but above all "would permit the construction of a security cordon along Egypt's open frontier". It could "convert immense areas into something resembling settlements (*mustawtanat*) in the desert, which would form a barrier against terrorists and conspirators entering Egypt".¹²⁶ *Mustawtana* can equally mean "colony", and the word resonates since it is especially used to refer to Israeli settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories. This security-fixated conception of development is accompanied by the authorities' declared wish to "Egyptianise" the region, not only in economic and demographic terms but also, symbolically, in cultural and identity terms.

The following experience is indicative. At the beginning of the 1990s, a group in Al-Arish mobilised to create a Bedouin Heritage Museum. It had the support of several donors (notably Swiss and Dutch). Inaugurated in 1994, it was intended eventually to house a documentation and research centre on Bedouin culture. It revived interest in the Bedouin heritage, and projects were launched at the same time to develop and promote regional Bedouin crafts (mainly embroidery and carpets). These supplied tourist bazaars, and the skilful work made the women of Al-Arish famous throughout Egypt.

In 2003, the Supreme Council for the Antiquities (SCA) and the governor of North Sinai decided to

create a museum in Al-Arish to exhibit some 2,000 antiques in 2,500 sq. metre space. A budget of 47 million Egyptian pounds (\$8.3 million) was allocated to the project, which, according to Mahmoud Mabrouk, director-general of the museum department at the Supreme Council for the Antiquities, "aimed to create not only a museum, but rather a cultural centre for the town's residents as well as for foreign visitors".¹²⁷ The objective was to recount Sinai's history from prehistoric times to the Muslim conquest. In addition, the Supreme Council for Antiquities allocated 10 million Egyptian pounds (\$1.8 million) to begin excavations to restore Nabathaeon, Semitic and Pharaonic sites.¹²⁸

The project would have been an interesting initiative in a town where cultural activities are in short supply; however, it threatened closure of the Bedouin Heritage Museum and its research centre. The new museum did not include a "local arts and traditional crafts" section, and the founders of the Bedouin Heritage Museum have been gradually excluded from its administration, while the premises have fallen into decay and are threatened with demolition by the local authorities to facilitate the extension of an adjoining marble factory.¹²⁹ The fate of this museum exemplifies the implementation of a centralist, authoritarian vision of the Egyptian government that generally ignores the special characteristics of its provinces. A member of an NGO in Al-Arish exclaimed:

Who is this Pharaonic museum for, when the central authorities do nothing to promote the culture of the local population? For foreign tourists? Who comes on holiday to Al-Arish? Only Egyptians! Young people don't have any jobs; my sons left university a year ago, and they still have not found a job....you have to go to Cairo if you want [health] care of an acceptable quality. And all that money for a museum that is of interest to nobody, except the governor and some people in Cairo.¹³⁰

The schooling of Bedouin children is another particularly sensitive identity issue, one especially open to conflict between regional culture and national history. History is generally taught by non-Bedouin with a perspective in which the Pharaonic heritage is officially assumed as being constitutive of the Egyptian nation. The story of a young Tarabin (later taken out of school) is indicative of the misunderstandings between the local

¹²⁵ Ashraf Ayub, "Sinai in danger: sons of the country are refused the right to own property", *Al-Ahaly*, 14 June 2006 and Crisis Group interview with Ashraf Ayub, Al-Arish, June 2006.

¹²⁶ "Sinai's agricultural potential ... but there is no investment", *Al-Wafd*, 15 May 2006.

¹²⁷ *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, 9 November 2006.

¹²⁸ *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 20 July 2005.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Al-Arish, June 2006.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Al-Arish, June 2006.

population and Egyptians throughout the peninsula. He reminded his teacher that the Sinai Bedouin are not descendants of the Pharaohs, but originally from the Arabian Peninsula, the land of the Prophet.¹³¹ The teacher, disinclined to debate and extremely irritated, had the son and his father summoned before the superintendent of police, turning the incident into one of public order.¹³²

In the view of many in the Al-Arish region, the state's interest in them is little more than an attempt to control:

The state has no social, cultural or economic project here, despite the many promises made over the last twenty years. The Egyptian state and its representatives despise the people. On the other hand, the police, yes, they are certainly here. That is the only state presence in the region.¹³³

This security presence is accompanied by a Bedouin settlement policy motivated by similar concerns, sometimes with donor support. The World Food Program (WFP) project in central Sinai is presented as a successful model for integrating local populations – the principle is to provide basic food assistance to families if they abandon their tents and live in houses.¹³⁴ But, after five years of funding, it is on the point of closure without having established the sustainable conditions for survival for the few dozen families involved.¹³⁵

The settlement policy experience leaves some development observers sceptical about the permanence of the new living conditions of the Bedouins and also about government population control policies.¹³⁶ These programs in fact reinforce the economic dependence of the most disadvantaged communities while accelerating the transformation of the social and economic practices that have been inherited from previous generations and form part of Bedouin identity.

They thereby endanger the very survival of Bedouin culture in the same way that the Bedouin Heritage Museum is threatened with closure.

The social and economic changes in the peninsula during the last fifteen years, combined with the high population growth rate,¹³⁷ have resulted in de facto settlement on the urban periphery by Bedouins seeking jobs and schooling for their children.¹³⁸ Permanent settlement is inevitable, but the support given by the authorities and donors is not suitable for achieving long-term objectives and is inappropriate to Bedouin needs.

¹³¹ In Islam, Pharaoh is an impious figure vanquished by the Prophet. He is considered to personify the time of *Jahiliyya* (period of pre-Islamic ignorance and disorder).

¹³² Crisis Group interview, Nuwayba', June 2006.

¹³³ Crisis Group interview with young resident of Shaykh Zwayd, an arts graduate working in a factory in Alexandria, June 2006.

¹³⁴ "Settling for More or Less?", *Egypt Today*, June 2006. The WFP program is at Abu Musafir, in North Sinai. The WFP is one of the recipients of a European Union grant, within the framework of the South Sinai Regional Development Program.

¹³⁵ *Egypt Today*, June 2006.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview with an NGO officer, Al-Arish, June 2006.

¹³⁷ No figures are available but observations and interviews indicate a particularly high birth rate among Bedouin women. Crisis Group interviews, women from the Muzayna and Tarabin tribes, June 2006.

¹³⁸ The need to educate their children is not a negligible factor explaining the settlement on the urban periphery of families who also have a home in the desert or on the coast. For example, members of the Bedouin fishing communities in the Abu Gallum area all have other homes, either in the town or in the nearest village that has a school. They commute in the summer and according to the seasons. Crisis Group interview with residents of the Abu Gallum and Bir Al-Saghayr villages, Dahab region, June 2006.

VI. POLICY OPTIONS: DILEMMAS AND PRIORITIES

A. NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND TERRITORIAL CONTROL

The first political consequence of the terrorist attacks was revival of the debate regarding the conditions under which Egypt exercises sovereignty over Sinai – a debate which implicitly questions the terms of the Camp David Agreement. The irony of that agreement is that demilitarisation has highlighted the military and security stakes in the region and raised questions about the degree of Egyptian control over its national territory.

The quarter century of normalisation and stabilisation of Egyptian-Israeli relations, the economic agreements that have consolidated a partnership between the two governments, Egypt's diplomatic role in the region and the return of control of the Gaza border in 2005 all have encouraged numerous observers to argue for a redefinition of the peninsula's status which would eventually modify its complex regime. The provision in the 28 August 2005 agreement allowing Egypt to position 750 frontier guards on the Egyptian/Gaza border could be perceived as a first step to revise the Camp David agreement in a way that reduces the limitations placed on Egyptian sovereignty in Sinai.¹³⁹

B. REGIONAL SOLIDARITY AND BATTERED IDENTITIES

A second political consequence of the Sinai attacks has been the way they highlighted and called into question Egypt's relationship to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Alleged links between the terrorist organisation and Palestinian factions have not been proved by the Egyptian authorities and were denied by the Palestinian Authority. However, the long history

between Gaza and Sinai of commercial exchanges, tribal and family structures and military administration (Egypt from 1949 to 1967, Israel from 1967 to 1982) have built strong solidarity networks across the border that the second intifada has revived since 2000. The Egyptian Popular Committee in Solidarity with the Intifada (*al-lagna al-shaabiya al-misriya li tadamun al-Intifada*) was created in October 2000. Since then, mobilisation in solidarity with the Palestinians has been based primarily on a network of local committees that have been particularly active in the provinces, especially in the Delta regions (the Sharqiya district and the town of Mansoura), Assiut and, above all, North Sinai.¹⁴⁰

Members and sympathisers of the *Lagna*, in which all political tendencies are represented, have organised some forty humanitarian convoys to Gaza and have benefited from the support of Egyptian professional associations (doctors, engineers, lawyers, journalists), which have collected funds and donations throughout the country. Al-Arish and its local committee act as the logistical and political centre of this mobilisation. The Rafah terminal, the only crossing point for Egyptian aid to Gaza residents, also has witnessed acts of solidarity.¹⁴¹

These actions have temporarily erased ideological divisions in the name of a common cause – support for the Palestinians – and have served as laboratories for experiments in political mobilisation and action.¹⁴² However, both the Palestinian solidarity networks and opposition movements face important barriers to their activism. The convoys chartered by the solidarity movement are often blocked at the border; the demonstrations are illegal under the terms of the Emergency Law and the collection of money is prohibited. The peaceful and popular expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people remains closely controlled and restricted and is treated as illegal or

¹³⁹ The sovereignty issue crops up even when least expected. On 22 August 2006, a bus was involved in an accident on the Tabá-Nuwayba' road, resulting in the death of twenty people, including ten Israelis, shocking Israeli public opinion. "The sovereignty and dignity of Egypt would not have suffered in any way if it had allowed Israeli ambulances to enter its territory", said the editor of the daily newspaper *Haaretz*, referring to the poor performance of the Egyptian emergency services. He subsequently reminded his readers of Sinai's function in Egyptian-Israeli relations: "... an expanse of land in which Israeli and Arab vacationers can find rest together", "The test of the accident in Sinai", *Haaretz*, 24 August 2006.

¹⁴⁰ These local networks to support the Palestinians are an underestimated and little publicised but effective aspect of political activism in Egyptian provinces.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, members of national and local committees, Cairo, Mansoura and Al-Arish, June 2006.

¹⁴² Political mobilisation against the Egyptian government is tightly connected with activism for regional causes (Palestinian and more recently Iraqi and Lebanese), as the latter operates as a catalyst for demanding domestic reforms. Furthermore, most members and leaders of the protest movement, founded in late 2004, known as *Kefaya* (literally, "Enough") have also been activists in the *Lagna*. For discussion of *Kefaya*, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°46, *Reforming Egypt: In Search of a Strategy*, 4 October 2005.

even subversive.¹⁴³ In the context of intensifying conflicts in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, security pressures in Sinai and the crackdown on the solidarity networks and opposition movements combined with discriminatory policies towards local Palestinians and Bedouin sharpen feelings of frustration and resentment towards a government that is discredited by its alignment with the U.S. and its economic agreements with Israel.¹⁴⁴

Various local people speak therefore of an “intifada generation”, politicised on the basis of its identity and religion and which, in the absence of a formal and recognised framework for expressing opposition, has become increasingly radicalised. People interviewed by Crisis Group in both the north and south of the peninsula agree that for some years religious sermons have become increasingly radical in certain local mosques and that Salafism is gaining ground.¹⁴⁵ In the Nuwayba’ district, a camp owner from Cairo banned Israeli clients from his establishment, “in solidarity with the intifada” and commissioned construction of an imposing mosque in order to fill the gap created by the lack of a place of worship in the region and to “occupy the terrain and not leave it to the ‘islamiyya’” (Islamists, here the Salafis).¹⁴⁶

The political radicalisation of religious discourse generally finds fertile ground in Sinai’s sensitive

identity issues. “I am a Muslim, an Arab, a Tarabin Bedouin, from Sinai and from Egypt”, a Bedouin from Nuwayba’ told Crisis Group when asked to define his identity. “I am a Muslim from the Sawarka tribe (*qabila*), and the Abu Shafi family (*‘aila*), a Bedouin (*badu*), an Arab, and my nationality is Egyptian (*gansiyya misriyya*)”, said an Al-Arish resident. In both cases, religion and tribe were mentioned first. Religion is a constitutive element of Bedouin identity – referring to geographic origin in the Land of the Prophet – and social life. It structures local societies and is often the only defence against rapid and brutal social, economic and cultural changes involved with state settlement policies and imposed schooling. Because Islam is the primary aspect of Bedouin identity, and non-Muslim elements are absent from the region, religion also helps Sinai people distinguish themselves from the Pharaonic heritage that state institutions want to establish as a shared element of national identity.

Identity is especially sensitive in Sinai given the history of the region and its populations and the link to regional conflicts, which are factors that might push individuals towards political radicalism. The itineraries of members of *Tawhid wa Jihad*, whatever its connections with foreign terrorist organisations, reveal strikingly this phenomenon of radicalisation of the younger generation, whose attraction to militant Islamic activism may result from a combination of socio-economic despair, identity crisis and regional solidarity. Often educated, well-informed and politicised, they have no room for manoeuvre in the limited framework for mobilisation and political action allowed by a central government that is disliked if not hated.

The risks of radicalisation are further exacerbated by generally poor economic and social development and inequalities in the exploitation of the region’s resources. The state is seen in Sinai as dominated by Cairo political and economic elites, an instrument of repression and monopoly in the north and the major beneficiary of the economic development of the last fifteen years in the south.

C. “COLONIAL” ATTITUDES

“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”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ For example, on 10 December 2004, a convoy carrying several tons of goods (gifts from individuals and organisations) and chartered by the regional Egyptian committees formed by professional associations was barred from crossing the border. It was accompanied by about 300 people, including representatives of all opposition political tendencies (the left and the Muslim brotherhood), intellectuals and artists and an international delegation led by the Parisian Senator, Alima Boumédiène-Thiery. The Egyptian police halted it in the middle of the desert, confiscated the camera of an Al-Jazeera journalist, manhandled some people and arrested six members of the al-Arish local committee, including its leader, Ashraf Ayoub; Crisis Group interview with members of The Egyptian Popular Committee in Solidarity with the Intifada, Cairo and Al-Arish, June 2006.

¹⁴⁴ These agreements are endorsed by official religious authorities. The Egyptian mufti, Ali Gomaa, declared that the QIZ agreement was comparable to all other international trading agreements, were in Egypt’s interests and that trade with the Jews has been carried on in Islam since the Prophet’s time, *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 24 December 2004.

¹⁴⁵ That is, the most dynamic current of fundamentalist missionary activism in Sunni Islam; for a detailed discussion, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Sherif al-Ghamrawy, head of the NGO Hemaya and owner of the “Bassata Camp”, Nuwayba’, June 2006.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, young university graduate, a worker in Alexandria originally from Shaykh Zwayd, June 2006.

This remark of a resident of the Shaykh Zwayd district, pointing as he spoke at the public housing built for workers at an olive oil factory and their families, all originally from the Nile Valley, expresses local resentment of privileged “outsiders”, that is, Egyptians from the valley. Above all, it underscores the unequal treatment regarding access to jobs, health, education and housing. The local populations, especially the Bedouin, inevitably perceive government economic development policies in Sinai to be discriminatory since the only measures directed at them are for the settlement programs, which consist mainly of donor food aid and respond primarily to the security objective of controlling them.

Moreover, although access to local political institutions (whether representative or not) is not completely closed to the Bedouin, it is very closely controlled and co-opted. The representation and leadership of the Bedouin tribes is subject to police regulation and approval, including selection of each tribe’s official spokesman in dealings with the authorities from among several names proposed by the tribal council.¹⁴⁸ The alliances and competition that such procedures, based on divide-and-rule tactics, promote within the tribes have important consequences: destabilisation of “traditional” hierarchies; redefinition of the terms of representation within tribes; adoption by some of a strategy of rapprochement with power centres (notably the ruling National Democratic Party) in which individual interests may supplant those of the group; and alliances of convenience, notably at election time, but also to facilitate acquisition of donor funds.

Local observers are particularly critical of the selection procedures for projects put forward for European funding. Because only officially recognised Bedouin representatives are eligible for funding, these procedures reinforce unequal access to development project opportunities at the local level and consolidate a discriminatory system.¹⁴⁹

More generally, such procedures mirror existing patterns: in the north, where the state has failed to deliver on its declared intention to promote reconstruction and economic as well as social development; in the south, where such development is understood in terms of a collusion of interests – to the detriment of local populations – between the authorities and the private sector, with the financial support of international agencies. Although lack of development cannot explain the terrorism that has affected Sinai since 2004, an economic policy that takes into account the population’s basic needs would promote social peace and local feelings of gratitude and of belonging to the nation.

¹⁴⁸ The procedure is the opposite of that adopted by Israel during the occupation. The Israelis, to gain the allegiance of Sinai tribes, created a system whereby the *shaykh* was paid a salary. This was accompanied by monthly consultation meetings. Martin Glassner, “The Bedouin of Southern Sinai under Israeli-Occupation”, *Geographical Review*, vol. 64, n°1, January 1974.

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Bruno François, ex-consultant for the South Sinai Regional Development Program, Sharm al-Shaykh, June 2006. A general rule of development project funding is that only legal entities (local government agency, NGO, enterprise or organisation) and no individuals can apply.

Generally, very few Sinai Bedouin fulfil this basic condition. Eligibility conditions are at <http://www.eu-ssrdp.org/>.

VII. CONCLUSION

The five terrorist attacks in Sinai between October 2004 and April 2006, attributed to the previously unknown Egyptian organisation *Tawhid wa Jihad*, raised crucial questions for Egypt and the region. But the main questions that were asked – “were they the work of al-Qaeda?” and, more generally, “does al-Qaeda have a significant network in Egypt?”¹⁵⁰ – tended to obscure and distract attention from the underlying reasons, focusing instead on the security sphere where information is sparse, partial and often contradictory.

In light of information currently available, it would be hazardous to advance a definitive explanation for the attacks. But information on leading members of the terrorist organisation provides a starting point for refocusing analysis on the Egyptian and regional contexts and offers important clues to the underlying political and socio-economic dimensions of the terrorist phenomenon in Sinai.

In turn, these aspects suggest there may be important non-coercive policy options, outside the narrow sphere of security and policing, that the government should pursue, starting with recognition that the attacks pose four inter-related problems: prevention, regional conflict, identity and economic development.

- Effective prevention depends above all on good intelligence, which in turn depends on a fundamentally cooperative attitude of the majority of the local population. Arguments about Egyptian sovereignty over the peninsula and its borders should not focus exclusively on the freedom of action of the security forces and deployment of new contingents, but should take into account the need for Egyptian rule in Sinai to be perceived as legitimate because truly national in character. This requires that the state work to transform local attitudes by adopting an entirely new policy aimed at fully integrating the region's population, on terms it can accept, into the Egyptian national community.

- A comprehensive and lasting resolution of the Sinai question can only be achieved in the context of a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Violence in Gaza has hardly stopped since Israel's August 2005 withdrawal, and control of the border crossing is accordingly as problematic as ever and at least partly subject to Israeli army decisions. The continuing border problem cannot realistically be attributed simply to the failings of the Egyptian and Palestinian forces, but rather to the protracted failure to resolve the wider conflict and the relentless tendency for it to escalate and spill over into Egypt.
- The terrorist attacks also revealed problems relating to the character of the populations – the very diverse Palestinian and Bedouin communities – which are both wholly specific to Sinai and connected to the region's history of conflicts. Leading members of the terrorist organisation were Bedouin and/or Palestinian by origin, that is, members of two groups which are socially, culturally and economically discriminated against and constrained, on a daily basis, by security measures: in the north, because of the problematic border with Gaza and, in the south, in order to protect foreign tourists. In short, Sinai's integration into Egypt comes up against the intrinsic peculiarities of a profoundly transnational region that, historically and demographically, faces east rather than towards Cairo. The government's authoritarian, centralising policies inevitably strengthen local identity claims.
- The terrorist attacks should prompt a review of what Sinai is today, namely a geographical crossroads subject to military regimes, where the general euphoria following the return to Egypt in 1982 vanished quickly as the central government neglected its populations. The social and economic inequalities between north and south have become more pronounced, even though the two regions should complement each other. With better policies, the north's workforce and agricultural production could serve the rapidly expanding tourism industry in the south.

¹⁵⁰ At the beginning of August 2006, the al-Qaeda number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, announced on al-Jazeera that some members of *Jamaa Islamiyya* had joined the organisation, *Le Monde*, 6 August 2006. This was denied by spokespeople of the Egyptian organisation. On 1 September, fifteen people were arrested in Alexandria for belonging to the al-Qaeda network, and the Egyptian and Israeli authorities made a public announcement about the presence of five alleged members of al-Qaeda in the Sinai region, *Al-Misry al-Youm*, 2 September 2006; *al-Ahaly*, 5 September 2006.

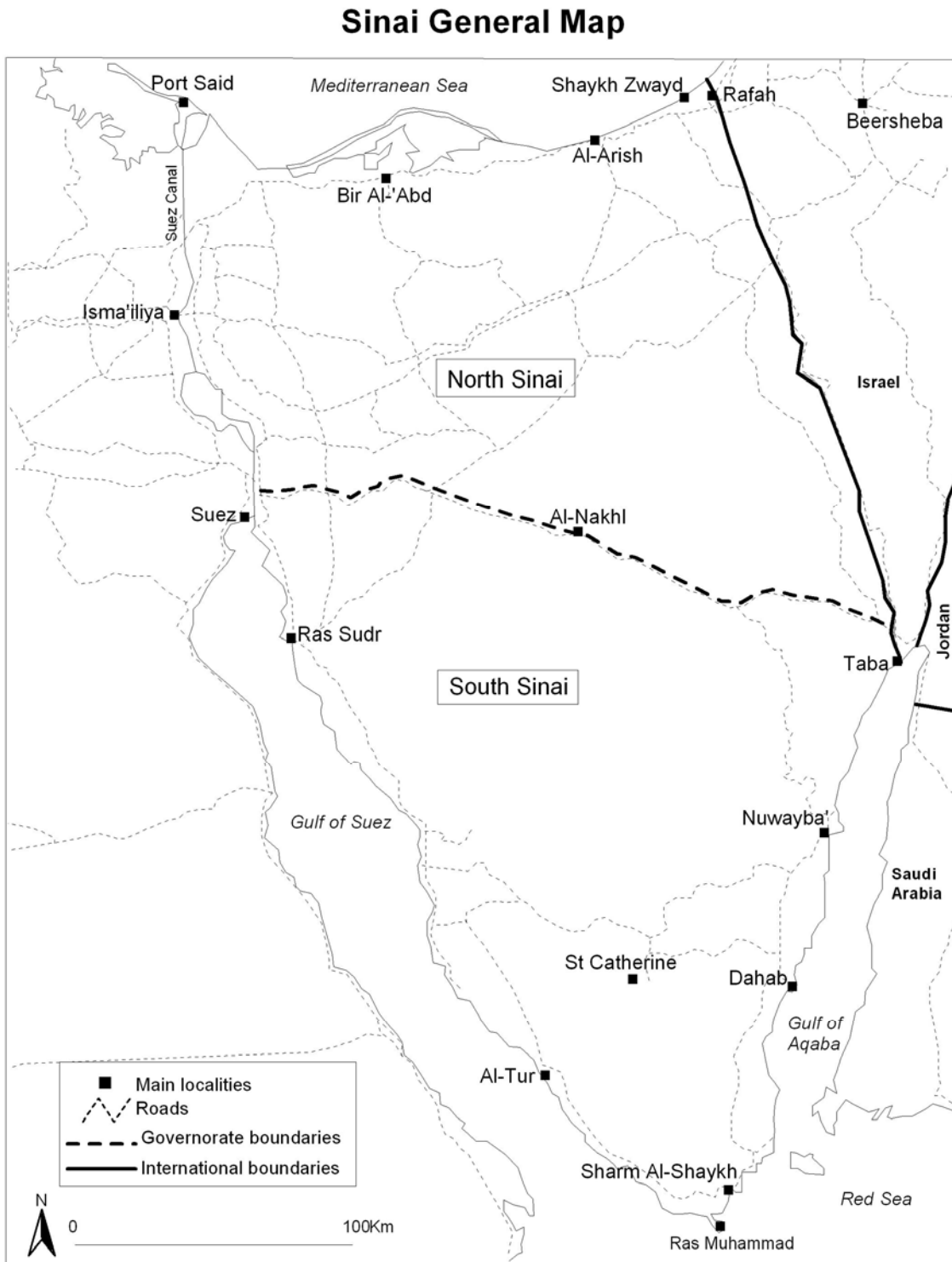
While lasting stabilisation may only be achievable with political resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict that should not prevent short-term action. Easing tension between the government and the local populations must involve improving the image of the former and recognising the latter, through redefinition of the political, economic, social and cultural choices

made for the region. In particular, the government should commit itself to a new economic and social development strategy aimed clearly at benefiting the population as a whole without discrimination. The genuine recognition of Sinai and its people as an integral part of the Egyptian nation is at stake.

Cairo/Brussels, 30 January 2007

APPENDIX A

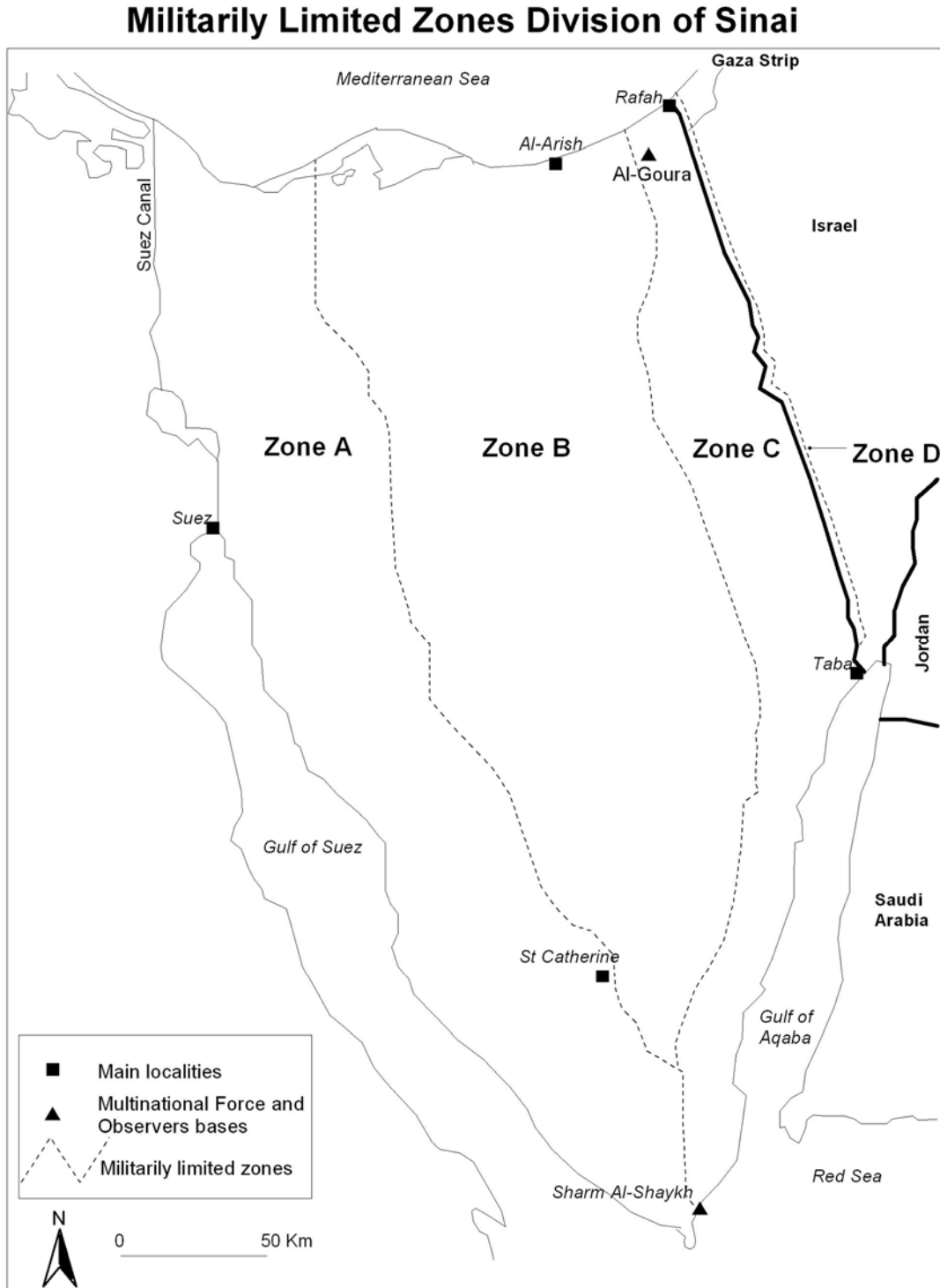
SINAI GENERAL MAP¹⁵¹



¹⁵¹ The western border of North Sinai governorate is located along the Suez Canal but does not include it.

APPENDIX B

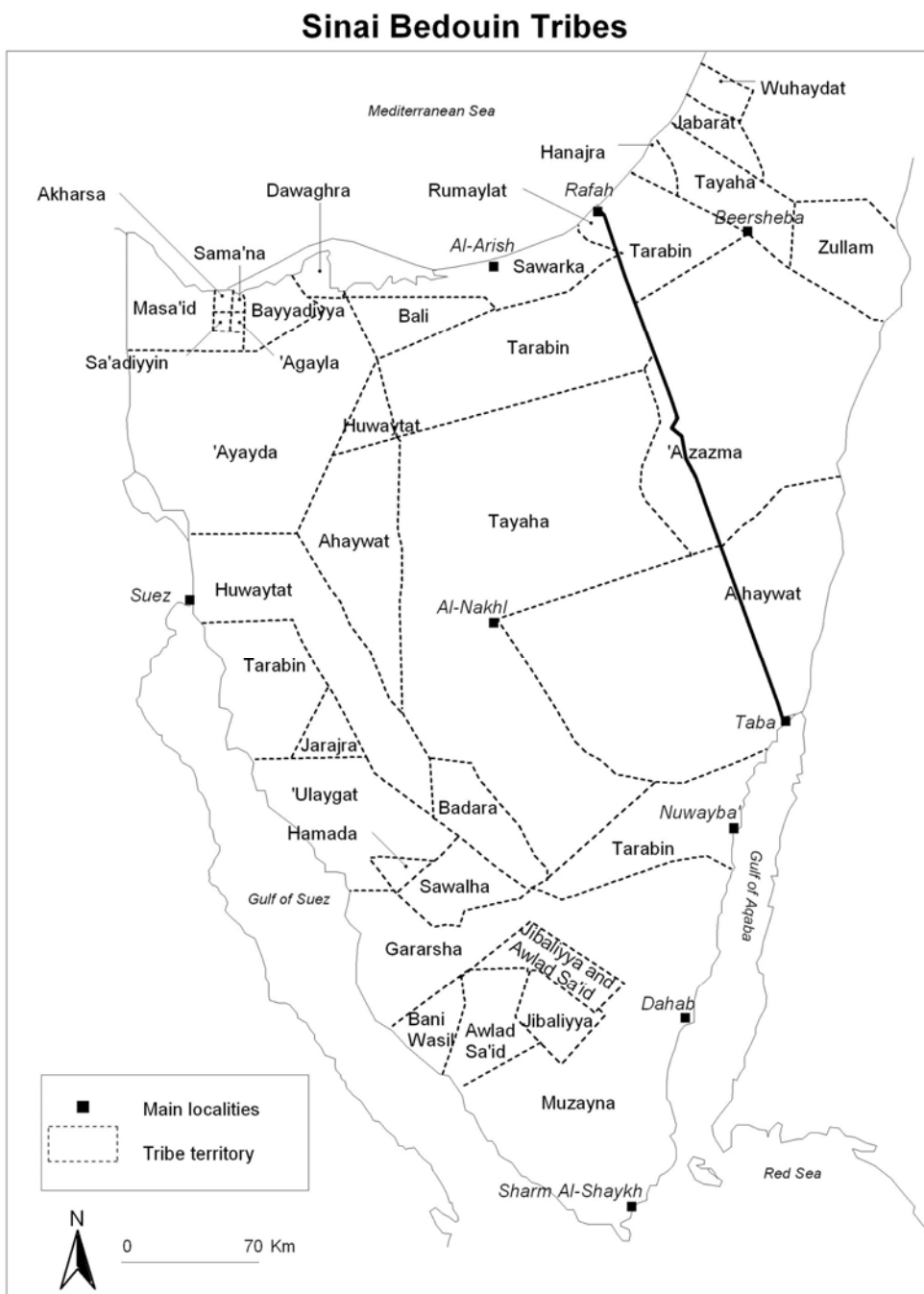
MILITARILY LIMITED ZONES OF SINAI¹⁵²



¹⁵² Source: "Annual Report 2004", Multinational Force and Observers, at www.mfo.org.

APPENDIX C

SINAI BEDOUIN TRIBES¹⁵³



¹⁵³ This map, which is printed by kind permission of Saqi Books, is from *Bedouin Poetry: From Sinai and the Negev*, by Clinton Bailey, © Saqi 1991 and 2002. It shows the approximate distribution of Bedouin tribes and is not exhaustive. Two tribes do not appear: the Malalha group is located in the center of North Sinai, in north of Tayaha territory; the Dbur tribe is located south west of Al-Nakhl locality. Crisis Group is grateful for review by Rudolf De Jong, author of *A Grammar of the Bedouin Dialects of the Northern Sinai Littoral: Bridging the Linguistic Gap Between the Eastern and Western Arab World* (Brill, 2000), Crisis Group interviews, June 2006 and January 2007.

APPENDIX D

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

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