



Incident between Egyptian army forces and ISIS in the Suez Canal region

November 22, 2022

Overview

- ▶ From the night of November 18, 2022, until the early morning hours of November 19, 2022, there were heavy exchanges of fire between Egyptian army forces and operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province who took over a number of government buildings (including a school) in the eastern part of the city of Al-Qantara, which is close to the Suez Canal. At least five soldiers, including an officer or two, were killed, and several others were wounded. The number of ISIS operatives who were involved in the incident is unknown but many of them were apparently killed or wounded.
- ▶ ISIS claimed responsibility for the event. The Egyptian army imposed a media ban on the incident, and most of the information was gathered from posts uploaded to social media by local sources, who were cited on the media in the Arab world.
- ▶ This is the second time this year that ISIS activity takes place in the region of the Suez Canal, one of the most important maritime traffic routes in the world. The previous incident took place on May 7, 2022, when a group of ISIS operatives attacked a military post securing a water pumping station 26 km east of the Suez Canal. An officer and 16 soldiers were killed in that attack¹. The incident in this area may indicate the expansion of ISIS's activity in the Sinai Peninsula with the presence of operatives in the Suez Canal region after they have been driven away last year from Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid and Bir al-Abd by Egyptian security forces.
- ▶ The clashes indicate once again that in spite of the severe blow sustained by ISIS's infrastructure in the Sinai Peninsula, the Egyptian security forces still face difficulties coping with the organization's operatives. The fact that in order to deal with a few ISIS operatives the Egyptian army had to send large reinforcements and even deploy the Air Force indicates that in spite of everything, ISIS has managed to retain its operational capabilities. On the other hand, it may indicate an operational weakness by the Egyptian army in the region.

¹ See the ITIC's inform from May 17, 2022, "ISIS attacks a strategic facility in Sinai – Significance and possible implications"

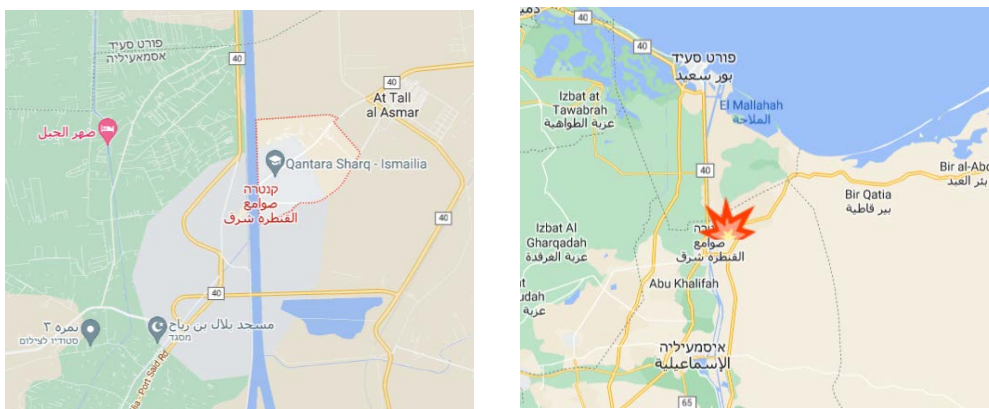
► It should be noted that the Suez Canal is a strategic region representing an international traffic artery of importance for world trade in general and for the Egyptian economy in particular. The expansion of ISIS's activity to this region may cause damage to the Egyptian economy and also to international trade.

Details of the incident

► From the night of November 18, 2022, until the early morning hours of November 19, 2022, there were heavy exchanges of fire between Egyptian army forces and an ISIS squad whose number of operatives is unknown, that took over a number of government buildings, including a college of pharmacy studies and a school in the eastern part of the city of Al-Qantara (Al-Qantara al-Sharq), which is located in the Ismailia Governorate, close to the Suez Canal and about 40 km south of Port Said.

► Large Egyptian army forces were sent to the area and deployed on the site, especially around the school where ISIS operatives had barricaded themselves. Sinai Tribal Union fighters arrived as well to support the Egyptian forces. Egyptian Air Force fighter jets fired missiles at the school and a part of the building collapsed.

► An officer with the rank of lieutenant colonel (according to another version, two officers) and six soldiers (according to another version, five soldiers) were killed and several others were wounded. It appears that the ISIS operatives who barricaded themselves in the school were killed (Al-Araby al-Jadeed and Al-Bawaba, November 19, 2022; Mu'asasat Sinaa li-Huquq al-Insan's Twitter account, November 19, 2022). One of the officers who were killed is Lieutenant-Colonel Muhammad Abd al-Ilah Saleh (hassanbasha66 Twitter account, November 20, 2022). Most of the ISIS operatives were reportedly killed or wounded.



Al-Qantara al-Sharq in the northwestern Sinai Peninsula (Google Maps)



Right: The school where the ISIS operatives barricaded themselves (Mu'asasat Sinaa li-Huquq al-Insan's Twitter account, November 19, 2022). Left: Damage caused by a missile fired at the building from an Egyptian fighter jet (radwa_rody88 Twitter account, November 19, 2022)



Right: An Egyptian army force that operated in the area (ManalMo82907893 Twitter account, November 19, 2022). Left: Smoke clouds rising from the scene of the exchanges of fire (radwa_rody88 Twitter account, November 19, 2022)



Lieutenant-Colonel Muhammad Abd al-Ilah Saleh of the Egyptian army, who was killed in the exchanges of fire (Tahiyya Misr Twitter account, November 19, 2022)

- ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack in two statements (the one issued by ISIS's Sinai Province and the other by ISIS's Amaq News Agency). According to the statements, a small group of operatives exchanged fire with large forces of the Egyptian army and fired machine

guns at them from the roof of one of the government buildings. ISIS did not report any casualties among its operatives (Telegram, November 20, 2022).



Claims of responsibility. Right: Statement by ISIS's Sinai Province. Left: Statement by the Amaq News Agency (Telegram, November 20, 2022)

► It should be noted that the Egyptian army imposed a media ban on the incident. It was also reported that the telephone and Internet lines in the area were cut off. Therefore, most of the reports on the incident rely on information posted by local sources on social media, which was also cited on the Arab world media (Al-Bawaba, November 19, 2022).