

MASARYK UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL STUDIES

Department of International Relations and European Studies
International Relations

Bedouins and Sinai Insurgency

Political Causes of Violence

MVZ489

Aneta Zachová

UČO: 414626

Brno, 2016

1 Introduction

After Arab Spring revolution in 2011 world media informed about numerous of attacks in Sinai Peninsula. Various radical Islamic groups claimed responsibility for those insurgencies and the situation escalated in 2013 and 2014. This paper deals with the causes of those violent attacks which occurred in connection with the fall of dictator Husni Mubarak, his replacement with Islamist Mohamad Morsi and final military coup and presidency of General el-Sisi. Those events led to instability of the government and rebel groups became more and more offensive. The motives of groups are mostly based on their allegiance to transnational Islamic groups as Islamic State or Al-Qaeda. But the main theme of this paper is more dedicated to ethnical issues than to religion. It will introduce the Bedouin ethnic group and its involvement in insurgencies connected to political situation in Cairo. The main motivation contrast between inequality between mainland Egyptians and Bedouin tribes, radicalization of Bedouins and their inconsistency - while in some attacks they are seen in violent actions against Egyptian security forces, potential cooperation between tribes and security forces is more and more discussed.

The paper will try to describe the radicalization of Bedouins and their involvement in outbreak of conflict with regard to theory of ethnic-grievance scepticism and opportunity model mostly discussed by Collier and Hoeffler (2004). Because of the limited extent of the paper, it will only introduce grievance and economical aspects and try to disprove a hypothesis of ethnic or political hatreds and grievances between Bedouins and the rest of Egypt suggested by numerous authors mentioned in the paper.

The aim of the paper is to test hypothesis:

Ethnic cleavage and grievance is not the reason why are Bedouins fighting in Sinai Peninsula

As there is a lack of quantitative data to measure Bedouins grievance and the level of inequality, this paper will qualitatively analyse this group. The paper will first briefly introduce the situation in Sinai, characterise Bedouin tribes in Egypt and after that it will analyse ethnical-grievance and opportunities aspects and introduce an explanation if ethnicity is the reason of Bedouin aggressions in Sinai.

2 Sinai insurgencies after Arab Spring

Sinai Peninsula is considered as a territory with high level of security instability. It is not only because of historical issues and conflicts between Egypt and Israel¹, but also nowadays it is place, where occur civil conflicts. According to Uppsala Conflict Database Program (UCDP) after Arab Spring revolution in 2011 which eliminated Husni Mubarak from presidency different jihadist groups started to operate in Sinai as a response to weakened government. It included several attacks on natural gas pipelines and the responsibility was claimed by terrorist group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (TIMEP, 2015, p. 7). This Egyptian Islamist group shared ideas with Al-Qaeda to destroy Israel and carried out some attacks against Israel.

In June 2012 Egyptian citizens democratically chose as their president Mohamed Morsi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood². As world media informed, only one year after elections there were massive demonstrations accusing Morsi of failure in promoting democratic principles. Demonstrations lead to military coup and from that time the state is under control of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. This military coup is considered as a motive for violent insurgencies in Sinai Peninsula (Laub, 2013). Violent actions were seen since that time and more groups started its violent actions. The escalation of violence in Sinai Peninsula led to the counter-terrorism operations of Egyptian military government (UCDP).

Regarding other actors of the minor armed conflict³, there was not only Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, but also Afnad Misr, Popular Resistance Movement and Revolutionary Punishment (TIMEP, 2015, p.8). In February 2014 Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis⁴ officially announced that because of political situation in Egypt they shifted their aims to rebel against security forces of Egypt to protect their Islamic ideas. Some attacks both against Egyptian forces and jihadists were also launched by Bedouin tribes (CDA Institute, 2015, Reuters, 2015).

¹ Six-Day War (1967), War of Attrition (1967-1970) and Yom Kippur War (1973)

² Muslim Brotherhood is Islamist party which won the Egyptian polls in 2012. During the rule of Husni Mubarak it was abandoned.

³ UCDP defines minor armed conflicts where from 25 till 1000 people die for the year and the duration of the conflict

⁴ In November 2014 the group pledged allegiance to the so called Islamic State of Iraq and Levant and became its province - Wilayat Sinai.

3 Bedouins in Sinai

As this paper is focused on ethnicity and grievance model, first it has to define Bedouins as ethnic group. Bedouins are missing in most of the ethnic group lists such as GREG, EPR or Minority at Risk dataset.

Considering definition of ethnicity given by (Horowitz, 1985, p. 53) ethnic groups are defined by common colour, language and religion and it covers also tribes, races, nationalities and castes. Also common origin can be added to this definition.

Bedouin tribes are historically connected with the territory and they represent seventy percents of the Sinai population (Breen, 2013, p. 19). Most of the tribes have their origins in the Arabian Peninsula and Eastern Mediterranean region. International Crisis Group (2007, p. 7) estimated the number of Bedouins as 360 000 and they are divided into fifteen main tribes.

The original way of Bedouins life is called “nomadism”. It means moving from place to place, but there is a minority of Sinai Bedouins living in nomadic style. Egyptian tribes were mostly located in central and southern parts which are covered by mountains and deserts. Even though they are not marked by common way of life the Bedouins still have feeling of common identity (Ibid.) and that is important for characterization of them as ethnic group. It is also important that Sinai Bedouins have common origins with Palestinian and Israel Bedouins and they are proud of their shared culture and religion, which is mostly Islamic.

As De Jong (2011, p.1) written in his comprehensive study of Bedouin dialects in Sinai, most of the modern Bedouins are now serving as a staff in touristic sector. The growth of tourist sector in Sinai Peninsula also fragmented local tribes and dialects. Most of the Bedouins live now in northern part of the peninsula and close to the Gaza Strip. But originally they were settled in South and Central part of the territory (Ibid., p. 2).

Bedouin tribe leaders are for decades complaining about the repression from Egyptian Government. Due to the touristic growth of the South and industrialization of the North, Bedouin tribe became economically and also politically neglected (Pelhalm, 2012, p. 2). Also many Egyptians from Nile Valley come to Sinai to work there and to join security forces, but Bedouins opportunities were limited (Ibid., p. 3). As a response Bedouin started to identify themselves much more different from Egyptian citizens.

To explain their ethnical distinction, the paper quotes from the study of Nicolas Pelhalm (2012, p. 1) who did an interview with Bedouin tribe leader: *“Our language and our traditions are the same as Gaza’s. We’re 40 kilometres from Rafah, and 200 kilometres from Cairo.”* According to Roeder (1988, p. 14) the Bedouins have also distinguish view on the modern aspects of civilization and they would accept their traditional nomadic living standards. Their allegiance to the eastern Arabs is Egyptian Government obviously marginalizes the province’s residents.

After the fall of Mubarak, Bedouins saw in the revolution opportunity how to change their economical and political situation. It was claimed that because of inequality between Egyptians and Bedouins many jihadist activists were recruited from Bedouins when power vacuum emerged in 2011⁵. As world media informed, Bedouins were responsible for numerous of attacks in Sinai from 2011. At the same time it is not clear if Bedouins as a ethnic group support Islamic militants or Egyptian forces. Some of the attacks conducted by Bedouins were aimed against Egyptian soldiers or pipelines providing Israel with gas (The Guardian, 2012) while in 2015 Bedouin tribes leaders said that they will join Egyptian security forces in matter of dealing with jihadist activities (Reuters, 2015).

⁵ For example CDA Institute: The Radicalization of the Sinai Insurgency <https://www.cdainstitute.ca/en/blog/entry/the-radicalization-of-the-sinai-insurgency> or Middle East Institute: Terrorism in Sinai <http://www.mei.edu/sinai-terrorism>

4 Radicalization of Bedouins

From previous chapters it is clear that Bedouins radicalized and became involved in the Sinai insurgencies. As mentioned before, Bedouins in last few years attacked both Egyptian forces and jihadists were also launched by Bedouin tribes (CDA Institute, 2015, Reuters, 2015). As several researches suggest, the cause of their radicalization is ethnic hatred based on decades of neglect by Egyptian government and from that arising of shared feeling of grievance with jihadist groups (Joya, 2015; Rantac, 2014, Stewart, 2011, CDA Institute, 2015) while political instability after 2011 created space for their actions. Alternative explanation is that Bedouins take advantage in this complicated period to benefit economically and so potential opportunities are the main reasons of involvement in conflict.

4.1 Ethnic-grievance aspects

Ethnic-grievance is by prominent authors (for example Cederman, 2005, p.5) measured by data provided clear information about the level of political discrimination or model EGIP. Because of the lack of such information this paper will more present qualitative factors which may lead to grievance of the ethnic group.

As Collier and Hoeffler (2004, p. 570) introduced in their research, grievance can be measured in four main aspects: ethnic hatred, political repression, exclusion and economic inequality.

Regarding ethnic hatred, some features of ethnic distinctions were already mentioned in the previous chapter. Bedouins are not in their nature negatively looking on mainland Egyptian. As study of Tahrir Institute suggest, one of the ethnic problem can be seen in fact that Sinai was in 70s occupied by Israel so there is a space for mistrust from mainland Egyptians (TIMEP, 2015, p. 10). But the main problem is in political and economical inequalities. Locals are legally and socially discriminated which removes them from the rest of the Egypt not only geographically but also in the matter of identity. Cause of this marginalization is deeply connected with complicated history, not very pleasant climate and underdevelopment (TIMEP, 2015, p. 10).

Other important work showing grievance factors in Sinai is Pelhalm (2012). His research includes interviews with Bedouin tribe leaders and it can bring fresh perspectives. As Pelhalm claims (2012, p. 3) Bedouins could not join military and security services during the

rule of Husni Mubarak. So they have only little opportunities and after the growth of tourism in southern city Sharm and Sheik, many mainland Egyptians find a job there. Pelhalm points out that many Bedouin regard these „newcomers“ as an alien entity (Ibid.)

Also according to Joya (2012, p. 53) in Sinai there is observable strong sense of tribal and religious identity which overcomes the Egyptian nationalism. But also this is more connected to weakness of Egyptian government than to ethnic hatred.

Economical inequalities are also visible in the Sinai case. Bedouins are not only banned from military and state jobs, but also from providing tourism services (International Crisis Group, 2007, p. 13). Lack of job leads to the economical problems of locals and gave the space for development of smuggling and proliferation of smuggling tunnels going through North Sinai. This meant provision for some Bedouin tribes (TIMEP, 2015, p. 10). As Mubarak regime failed, president Morsi came with a proposal of equality for Bedouins (Ikhwanweb, 2012). But due to short period of Morsi's presidency and military coup and unrests there was no evidence of improvement of Bedouin situation. Also Egyptian government started to fight with smuggling and flooded many tunnels. Stop of the tunnels meant stop of the profit to the Bedouin tribes.

Social and economic deprivation of Bedouins is due to above mentioned factors clear and it supports grievance theory of Sinai insurgencies. Also switch of the Bedouins tribes to fight Islamic jihadists and join government forces can be supported by the ethnical aspects. Some of the Bedouins were killed by jihadists and the involvement of Bedouins in counter-terrorist operation may be due to their demand for revenge as written in a Sinai tribal leaders meeting statement (AswatMasriya, 2015). Jihadists can be seen also as a threat to Bedouins traditions (Reuters, 2015).

4.2 Opportunity aspects

This paper offers also alternative point of view through the opportunity explanation of the series of insurgencies in which Bedouins were involved. The main motive for this alternative explanation is unclear allegiance of Bedouins. While some of them joined jihadists some of them switch and launched cooperation with Egyptian forces even though Bedouin tribe leaders claimed for decades that they are facing discrimination from the government (Ahramonline, 2012).

One of the factors why Bedouins are joining Islamists can be surely the matter of payment for recruitment. As International Business Times (2015) presented in their article, the salary may be even 10 000 dollars which can be very tempting for economically deprived Bedouins.

As some of Bedouins were recruited by the jihadist groups, some Bedouins started to be open to the cooperation with Egyptian security forces. In this matter is observable that grievance and inequality arguments do not have the top importance. As Awad and Abdou (2015) suggested, Sinai tribes are fighting jihadist radicals, especially Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis later known as Sinai Province, an Islamic State affiliate, because they want to protect their economic interests. It claimed by one of the tribal leaders that jihadists are threat to livelihoods and business interests (Reuters, 2015). It is obvious that that it is in local tribes interest to provide people with security and economic stability.

Sinai Peninsula income mostly came from tourism which is now limited because of the bad security situation. As expressed by one leader Bedouin in interview with Al-monitor (2015): *“The livelihood and economy of the south Sinai Bedouin rely on tourism, and terrorism is our primary enemy as it destroys our families and future.”* Some Bedouins are also working for private touristic security companies (Ibid.).

Another support of importance of economical benefits and opportunities coming from the involvement in conflict is that Bedouins can be recruited by Egyptian security forces (Daily News Egypt, 2012). Economical factors supporting involvement Bedouins in conflict are also recommendations to invest in Sinai Peninsula to provide Bedouins with more opportunities (Siboni, Ben-Barak, 2013, p.13). If there is some press from organizations and other states to provide Bedouins with finance or improve the infrastructure of Sinai, it will mean huge opportunity for Bedouins to improve their life conditions and gain some economical benefit.

Summarizing the opportunity aspects, Bedouins are able to put aside their feeling of grievance in favour of their security and economical interests. Grievance is surely important aspect of the conflict in Sinai, but the switch in the tribal leaders' rhetoric and their commitment to join government security forces supports the opportunity motives.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explain the causes of involvement of Bedouin ethnic group in the Sinai Insurgencies which takes place after the Arab Spring revolutions. The paper tried to introduce two frameworks, the grievance model and the opportunity model and test the hypothesis that “*Ethnic cleavage and grievance is not the reason why are Bedouins fighting in Sinai Peninsula*”.

The qualitative analyse presented the four main aspects of grievance models and showed the high probability of grievance motives originating from the discrimination of Bedouins in Egypt. But regarding the approach of Bedouin tribes which are prone to put aside their grievance to match their interests, chapter focused on opportunities offered clear evidence, that commitment to fight is caused by demand of Bedouins for security and economical benefits.

It is important to mention that the paper will be much more academically contributive if more data are available and theories could be properly tested. Even though there are various studies on Bedouin tribes, they do not include quantitative analyses and they mostly support the grievance theory. There is a lack of reflection of the Bedouins opportunity and willingness to join Egyptian government in combating Islamist jihadist which are threat for their traditions, families, but also business interest. The role of the tourism and possible profit for local people is also very interesting theme, but because of the limited extend of this paper it was only briefly mentioned.

Causes of Sinai insurgencies were discussed regarding Bedouins, ethnicity and grievance. There are observable many violence-causing aspects such as fragmentation, horizontal inequalities, religion diversity or weakness of government and transition process launched by Arab Spring. Hopefully, this paper will be a contribution in discussion about the causes of civil conflicts and dealing with Sinai situation.

6 Sources

- Al-Monitor. "Egypt's security forces look to cooperate with Bedouin" 2015. Accessed 13 June 2016 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/egypt-economy-conference-sinai-bedouin-security.html#ixzz4BrZG86m4>
- Ahramonline. "Egypt's Sinai Bedouins cry out" 2012. Accessed 15 June 2016 <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/1/54170/Egypt/Egypt's-Sinai-Bedouins-cry-out.aspx>
- Anwat Masriya. "Egyptian tribes pledge to battle Islamist militant groups" 2015. Accessed 15 June 2016 <http://en.aswatmasriya.com/news/details/12142>
- Awad M.; Abdou M. "A New Sinai Battle? Bedouin Tribes and Egypt's ISIS Affiliate" 2015. Accessed 5 June 2016 <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/a-new-sinai-battle-bedouin-tribes-and-egypt-s-isis-affiliate>
- CDA Institute. "The Radicalization of the Sinai Insurgency", 2015. Accessed 24 May 2016 <https://www.cdainstitute.ca/en/blog/entry/the-radicalization-of-the-sinai-insurgency>
- Daily News Egypt. "Police recruits Sinai residents" 2012. Accessed on 12 June 2016 <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/09/29/police-recruit-sinai-residents/>
- De Jong, R. E. "A Grammar of the Bedouin Dialects of Central and Southern Sinai" Brill, 2011.
- Collier, P.; Hoeffler, A. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War" Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Horowitz, D. "Ethnic Groups in Conflict" Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985
- International Business Times. "How ISIS Recruits Around The World: Islamic State In Iraq And Syria Pays For Fighters, UN Experts Say", 2014. Accessed on 12 June 2016 <http://www.ibtimes.com/how-isis-recruits-around-world-islamic-state-iraq-syria-pays-fighters-un-experts-say-2144683>
- International Crisis Group. "Egypt's Sinai Question" Middle East/North Africa Report N°61, 2007. Accessed 30 May 2016 [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Egypt/61_egypt_sinai_question](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Egypt/61_egypt_sinai_question)
- Joya, A. "State Power and Radicalization in Egypt's Sinai" Canadian Journal for Middle East Studies, Vol. N.1, Aug 2015.
- Laub, Z. "Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Security" CFR.org. Council on Foreign Relations, 12 Dec. 2013. Accessed 14 June 2016 <http://www.cfr.org/egypt/egypt-sinai-peninsula-security/p32055>
- Middle East Institute. "Special Feature: Terrorism in Sinai" 2016 Accessed 15 June 2016 <http://www.mei.edu/sinai-terrorism>
- Pelhalm, N. "Sinai: The Buffer Erodes" Chatham House, 2012. Accessed 20 May 2016 <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Middle%20East/pr0912pelham.pdf>
- Rantac, J. "Egypt's interest in securing Sinai", OpenDemocracy, 2014. Accessed 29 May 2016 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/johnpaul-rantac/egypt%E2%80%99s-interest-in-securing-sinai>
- Roeder, L. "The Bedouin Tribes of the Sinai: Lecture Book by Larry Roeder", 1988. Accessed 12 June 2016 <http://www.artbyroeder.com/bedouin/Lecture%20Book%20on%20the%20Sinai%20Bedouin%20Tribes.pdf>

- Reuters. "*Special Report: Bedouins drawn into Egypt's Islamist fight*" 15 July 2015. Accessed 30 May 2016 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-islam-sinai-specialreport-idUSKCN0PP0UD20150715>
- TIMEP. "*Egypt's Rising Security Threat*" Egypt Security Watch, 2015. Accessed 30 May 2016 http://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Tahrir_Report_FINAL_WEB.pdf
- The Guardian. "*Sinai explodes into violence after years of chronic poverty and alienation*" 2012 Accessed 29 May 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/14/sinai-violence-poverty-alienation-bedouin-egypt>
- UCDP. "*Government of Egypt - Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis*" Accessed on 20 May 2016 <http://ucdp.uu.se/#/statebased/12487>