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*Rafah Border: Between Terrorism,  
Exogenous and Endogenous Pressures*

**Mostafa Mohamed El Kordy**  
*Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain*



## Background Rationale and Content

- In July 2018, a Euro-Mediterranean Research Network on Migration (EuroMedMig) was launched during the 15<sup>th</sup> IMISCOE Annual Conference in Barcelona, with an initial composition of 18 Members in the Steering Committee. Countries covered are: Algeria, Belgium, Egypt, Europe (EUI), Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, France, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Norway, Netherlands, Tunisia and Turkey. It has initially received institutional support from The Union for the Mediterranean and academically recognized as an IMISCOE Regional Network.
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## ***Abstract***

This working paper tackles border control policies in Egypt, focusing on Rafah border, possibly one of the most complex in the region and also in the entire world. Furthermore, I analyze the possible relation between the control of this border and terrorism in Sinai during different ruling regimes in Egypt – Mubarak, Morsi and el-Sisi- filling a crucial gap in the literature. This has been based on qualitative methodology, using case selection to identify and select major terrorist attacks during the different ruling regimes, and analyzing primary and secondary documents, jointly with expert interviews, to analyze the decisions taken by the different actors and reveal the inter-subjective reasoning behind each reaction in terms of border control. The results show that, surprisingly, all the different regimes analyzed took very similar paths of the adversarial approach. Also, despite the supposed relevance of terrorist attacks for border control, exogenous and endogenous pressure play a major role in shaping the border policies.

## ***Keywords***

Borders; terrorism; security; mobility; Palestine.

## ***Author's biography***

**Mostafa ElKordy** holds a Master's in Migration Studies from Universitat Pompeu Fabra. He won the Third Most Outstanding Master's Thesis Award from GRITIM-UPF 2019-2020 for his project entitled "Rafah Border: Between Terrorism, Exogenous and Endogenous Pressures". He has also recently been [awarded](#) with the Best Master Thesis Award 2021 by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed). Prior to his Master's degree, El Kordy completed a Bachelor's in Political Science at the American University in Cairo specializing in Middle East Studies. He has also worked in different NGOs in Egypt. Contact: [mostafaelkordy@aucegypt.edu](mailto:mostafaelkordy@aucegypt.edu).

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## Introduction

Rafah border between Egypt's North Sinai and Palestine (Gaza) has always been of a huge importance, and one of the most contested issues in the Middle East in the last decades. For Palestine, it is the only crossing point between Gaza and Egypt, and their only crossing point outside the Israeli territory, with thousands crossing it back and forth every year. While for Egypt, it has always been one of the most heated and contested issues for the ruling regimes and political parties taking different stances towards opening or closing the border, as it also plays a major role in the Egyptian politics. Adding to this, the political tensions include that "Gaza is regionally envisioned as part of a future state rather than being an autonomous country and thus Rafah is not approached as a 'normal' border between two sovereign states" (Peoples, 2012: 17). The Rafah border policy has taken different turns since 1982, when the Rafah border was made inviolable, after the demilitarization process between Egypt and Israel, which started with the ceasefire agreement in 1974, then an armistice arrangement in 1975, and finally, a peace treaty in 1979 (Peoples, 2012). The situation changed in 2005, when the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) was concluded between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel, when Israel dismantled its settlement blocks in the Gaza Strip (Ibid.: 24).

In parallel to this, Sinai in Egypt is a 60,000 km<sup>2</sup> borderland constituting 6% of Egypt's total area with a population of 600,000 people, consisting of Bedouin tribes who are considered as a minority group. However, Sinai is not a traditional borderland between Egypt and another sovereign country, it is between Egypt and the occupied Palestinian territories where Palestinians have no sovereignty over their land, which adds more to the complexity of the nature of this territory (See figure 1 & 2). Moreover, Sinai has a long history of conflict and a conducive environment for insurgency and militancy. It all started when Sinai Peninsula was captured by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and stayed under the Israeli occupation until part of it was recaptured in the 1973 war (Yom Kippur) by Egypt, then it was vacated from Israelis in 1982 after the Peace Treaty was signed between Egypt and Israel (Idris, 2017). However, during this period a conflict aroused between the Egyptian government and local Bedouin tribes due to the mistrust and skepticism from the government towards the tribes during the war, as some claim that they helped and spied for the Israeli forces during the war (Glassner, 1974). Also, the government's failure to address the developmental needs of the

tribes led to increasing anger and sense of alienation for the local population of Sinai (Idris, 2017). This instability, alongside the geographical position and dynamics, led to Sinai being a fertile land for terrorism and a training ground for militant groups from Egypt and some neighboring countries like Syria, Libya, and South African countries.

*Figure 1 –The Sinai Peninsula*



Shaded relief map of the Sinai Peninsula, 1992  
(produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons)

*Source: Sabry, 2014*

*Figure 2 –The Sinai Peninsula*



*Source: Safer World Report, 2017*

Terrorism in Sinai arose in mid-2000's targeting tourists' sights and hotels in Sharm el-Sheikh and Dahab by al Tawhid wal-Jihad, a militant Islamist group who were dominating the scene in Sinai during the 2000s, after several factions united under their movement (Hart, 2016). In 2011, the situation changed and erupted after the Arab Spring uprising, when Hosni Mubarak alongside the government was overthrown and the political scene was dominated by Islamist groups, most prominently, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and Salafists. During this period, all the militant groups and insurgencies coalesced under the umbrella group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Idris, 2017). Furthermore, 2013 was a turning point that brought radical changes in the nature of the Sinai conflict, after Morsi's ouster by the military (Ashour, 2015), as terrorism became one of the most prominent weapons used against the military as a method of showing the refusal and disapproval of the ousting of Morsi by the extremist militant groups, and most of their attacks took place in North Sinai.

Therefore, my research question will understand the connection and the configuration between both Rafah border and terrorism in Sinai, analyzing the different reactions and positions taken by different political regimes in Egypt. So, my research question is “How does the terrorism in North Sinai affect the border control in Rafah, during different ruling regimes in Egypt?”

My methodology to answer this question is to analyze some major terrorist attacks during Hosni Mubarak, Mohamed Morsi, and Abdelfattah El-Sisi. I will be examining their reactions and responses towards the attacks and what were their decisions regarding the Rafah border. This thesis is aiming to explore the different stances and positions of each regime towards Rafah border and the Palestinian cause through analyzing and comparing the different decisions they took in reaction to terrorism in North Sinai in respect to border control.

The paper is divided in to five main parts, firstly, I will be defining the theoretical framework and the potential contribution of my study to the literature (1). Then, I will be discussing the methodology I will be using to answer my research question in detail (2). Afterwards, in order to contextualize my topic, I will provide a historical background on Rafah border, including all the policies and agreements, then about terrorism in North Sinai and local Bedouin tribes (3). Furthermore, I will be the analyzing the selected terrorist attacks during each regime, and examining the reaction of the ruling regime and other parties during the incidents briefly, and focusing on the decisions of the ruling regime regarding the borders, and the approach taken, then make the connection between the attacks and borders (4). Finally, I will be concluding by summing up the analysis results, discussing the limitations of my research and future improvements, and draw further research areas related to this topic (5).

## **1. Theoretical Framework**

Part of the transformation in border studies has been the recognition that borders are institutions, as contrasted to simply lines in the sand or on the map (Paasi, 1998). Like any other institution, it has a set of rules and regulations governing it, as well as being used for either political or economic benefits. However, the complexity of the border is in its essence of separating the “us” and “them” (Oomen 1995; Sibley 1995), which in this case, the “us” are one territory, while the “them” are another territory. Which forces this institution (the border) to abide by bilateral or multi-lateral agreements and treaties to govern these borders, which some view as giving up part of the state’s sovereignty.

In that sense, William Connolly argues that “boundaries form indispensable protections against violation and violence; but the divisions they sustain also carry cruelty and violence” and he referred to the word territory being derived from the Latin word “terrere”, which means frighten or to terrorise (Vaughan-Williams, 2009).

The determination of what can and cannot pass by the border “is a function of how the power elites of a given society or country view the border as an institution which protects those who are on the “inside” or are “here” from the (perceived) negative impact of those who have been excluded and are on the “outside” or are “there” (Newman, 2003). This raises the point of the power relations on the borders, in which the logical question is asked, who benefits and who loses from these borders and their management?

Adding on to this, in the past, borders were perceived as something static with predominantly physical features, however, now the studies are shifted to see borders as a process that have socially constructed qualities (Wielgoths, 2013). This constructive strand of border study looks beyond the physical form of the borders and focuses on the “social practices and discourses in which boundaries are produced and reproduced” (Paasi, 2005). Borders are always subject to political contestation and change, which makes them considered to be “historically and politically contingent, and they are continuously remade on the basis of concrete political, cultural, and economic practices” (Stetter, 2008).

Sovereignty and territoriality are a historical contested issue, according to Stuart Elden:

*“The close relationship between modern sovereignty and territory is rendered in a triple way: as ‘the notion of equal sovereignty of states’, as ‘internal competence for domestic jurisdiction’ and as ‘territorial preservation of existing boundaries’. This means that state sovereignty resonates both “‘internal’ socio-political order and with ‘external’ socio-political order” (Cited by Makarychev, 2018).*

Internally, it is associated with the power to impose a political legal order “here, borders define the spatial scope of the exertion of legal authority as well as the creation of spatial zones of exception.” (Makarychev, 2018). When it comes to implementing sovereignty in borderlands, the exertion of sovereignty through border regimes seems to remain a main practice of statehood (Kolossoff, 2005). Thus, borderland is one of the most contested areas in regard to practicing states’ sovereignty, which makes numerous actors of different origin follow their own agendas in this area (Brunet-Jailly, 2011). However, “sovereignty is fundamentally related to controlling and filtering of movements – of people as well as of goods and money – ensuring territorial integrity and inviolability” (Makarychev, 2018). Thus, borders

can be used as indicators of the states' sovereignty. With the abovementioned, border regimes are constantly adjusted to new problematizations of governing, so one has to ask "What is the actual aim and subject of administrative/governmental strategies? And how are sovereign practices of the state reacting to shifts of currently perceived threats? What is the exertion of sovereignty aiming for at a given moment?" (Ibid.: 750).

Moreover, in the past 20 years, especially after 9/11 terrorist attack, a vast academic literature has been developed around the concept of bordering cities in response to acts of terrorism (Coaffee & Rogers, 2007). In this case, the argument was that "for new forms of counter-terrorist security to be successful they must not only be effective but must also be acceptable to the owners, inhabitants and users of particular places" (Ibid.: 3). These counter-terrorism forms can come in many ways, either security crackdown or bordering and re-bordering the cities or countries.

*"Borderings are practices that are situated and constituted in the specificity of political negotiations as well as the everyday life performance of them. They shift and are contested between individuals and groupings as well as in the constructions of individual subjectivities. The impact of this for border landers has been to disrupt the connection (real and imagined) between living at the border and borderwork."* (Cassidy et al., 2018)

While bordering might be theorized to take place anywhere and at any time, we must understand that they are still shaped by wider political projects of belongings (Yuval-Davis, 2013), as well as "narratives of popular imaginaries and situated gazes of differential social positionings" (Cassidy et al., 2018).

There are tons of research conducted on Sinai and terrorism on one hand, and a few researches done on Rafah border and how complex the situation is on a border falling between one country and another occupied territory which has no sovereignty or control over its land on the other hand. However, the gap in the literature is the connection between terrorism and insurgency in Sinai and the Rafah border control. There is no literature tackling how Rafah border was directly affected by the security deterioration in Sinai, nor how institutionalized the border has become, serving different agendas throughout different eras. This is the gap in the literature I will be trying to fill throughout this paper.

## **2. Methodology**

In order to answer my research question, I will be basing my thesis on qualitative methodology, as it digs in the inter-subjective reasoning behind the actions carried out by the



actors in a given context (Bevir & Rhodes, 2010). Therefore, in my case, trying to reach the different stances and positions taken towards the Rafah border and the Palestinian cause in general by different actors, through analyzing the decisions taken on the borders, I believe that the qualitative method is the most sufficient method to be used.

Furthermore, I will be conducting a brief analysis on the situation in Sinai, in respect to the troubled relation between the local Bedouin tribes and the government, in order to understand the reason behind Sinai being a breeding ground for terrorist groups. Then, in order to make the connection between the terrorist attacks in North Sinai and the border control in Rafah, I will be choosing the major terrorist attacks that took place in Sinai during each regime in Egypt in a chronological order, and check the decisions taken on the borders or the reaction of the ruling regime after the attack. By doing this, I will be able to analyze the different decisions taken on the borders, and analyse the different stances or positions taken by the different ruling regimes. Although the timeline might seem to be stretched out, by having Mubarak ruling Egypt for 30 years, Morsi for 1 year and El-Sisi for 6 years now, the main focus of the study will be from the mid-2000s till 2017. Still, the timeline of the study will not go for the whole period, as the main focus will be on the dates of the terrorist attacks between 2006-2017.

Regarding the terrorist attacks, I will be conducting a case selection by choosing the major terrorist attacks during each regime. I will be starting with Mubarak in the mid-2000s, then Morsi during his one-year rule in Egypt from 2012 till 2013, and finally El-Sisi from late 2013 till late 2017. During Mubarak, I have chosen the 2006 Dahab bombing, which led to the killing of 30 people and injuring more than 115 (Slackman, 2006), and the 2008 breach of Rafah border by Palestinians after masked gunmen used explosive charges to tear down the fence (NBC,2008). The reason behind choosing these two incidents was that the first incident was the first to take place after operating Rafah border in November 2005, while the second one was a direct attack on Rafah border which is the main focus of the thesis. While during Morsi, I have chosen the 5th of August 2012 attack, when armed men ambushed an Egyptian military base in North Sinai, killing 15 soldiers and stealing two armored cars which they used to infiltrate to Israel (Fahim & El Sheikh, 2012). The reason behind choosing only this event is that during Morsi there was little violence in Sinai (Breen, 2013) and this was the only major attack that affected the border control. Finally, during El- Sisi, I have chosen the 19th of August 2013 attack, when Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdes, ambushed a checkpoint in Rafah killing 24 soldiers

and injuring tens of them (Sabry, 2014). The reason behind choosing this attack, even though since Morsi was ousted there were more than 1,343 terrorist attacks in Sinai (Tahrir Institute, 2019), was that this was the first major attack after Morsi was ousted and some MB officials claimed that this attack will not be the last, until Morsi is back (Trager, 2016).

After collecting all the data on the terrorist attacks, and most importantly the reactions of the different ruling regimes and other political parties when relevant, I will be comparing the different decisions taken regarding Rafah border. Through the comparison of these decisions, I will be able to understand the different stances and positions these actors assumed towards Rafah border and the Palestinian cause. By connecting these positions with a detailed background about each actor, the whole picture would become clear at the end of the study.

Moving on to the sources, I will be using both primary and secondary sources. Regarding the primary sources, I will be analyzing official documents and governmental issues on Rafah border, alongside all the official treaties and agreements related to Rafah border and its management. While for the secondary sources, I will be using academic literature, books, different NGOs' reports, in-depth interviews with experts, and finally newspaper articles. Regarding the newspaper articles, as most or nearly all the newspapers have political affiliations, and in the Middle East, the affiliations are clear for everyone, I will be mentioning the background of each newspaper I will be using in order to check how even the media reacted towards the incidents in respect to their different political affiliations and how they serve different political agendas by using these incidents.

### **3. Rafah border, Sinai borderland and terrorism attacks: a historical contextualization**

#### ***3.1. The bordering and re-bordering of Rafah crossing point***

Rafah border has a long-troubled history dating back to 1906. The border has evolved in three main phases: (1) In 1906 when the British determined establishment of a natural boundary stretching from Rafah (Town in North Sinai) till the Gulf of Aqaba (a large gulf at the Northern tip of the Red Sea); (2) after the 1948 Middle East war, the 1906 border was deviated in order to put Gaza Strip under Egyptian rule; (3) after Egypt and Israel signed the Peace Treaty in 1979, when Rafah border was defined as 'inviolable' international boundary between Egypt, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Israel (Peoples, 2012).

Afterwards, in 1982 when the Peace Treaty was implemented and the Israelis vacated Sinai, the Rafah Crossing Point, which is a civilian crossing point between Egypt and Gaza Strip started operating and it was a subject to legal agreements operation. The kind of operation which was conducted was based on a cooperation system between Egypt, Israel, and Palestine, without any formal protocols or agreements. It depended on a notifying system where the Egyptian authorities had to notify an Israeli soldier sitting on the Gazan side of the crossing point about the passengers crossing in or out of Gaza, and this soldier had the ultimate power of decision on whether the passenger was to be granted the permission or not (Peoples, 2012). This situation worked with no official or formal agreement until 2005, when the unilateral disengagement of Israel from Gaza happened and in order to facilitate and formalize the movement process for Palestinians, the AMA was signed between Israel and the PA (EU CSDP, 2012). The agreement did not only focus on Rafah border or the crossing point, but it was meant to define safe passages between Gaza and the West Bank and the eight secure channels between the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Peoples, 2012).

*Figure 3 –The Sinai Peninsula*



*Source: Daily Egypt, 2015*

Focusing on Rafah, the Agreed Principles for Rafah Crossing (APRC), which is outlined as part of the AMA, stated that Rafah will be operated by the PA on its side, and Egypt on its side and that it will start operating as soon as the third party, which is responsible for the supervision of the PA, is on site. This third party was supposed to be the USA, however, they refused to play this role and the European Union took the role with the European Border Assistance Mission Rafah (EUBAM Rafah) (Kaya, 2017). Furthermore, the APRC states that “the crossing would be opened to Palestinian ID card holder and others by exception in agreed categories with prior notification to the Government of Israel (GoI) and approval of senior PA leadership.” (APRC, 2005). As a tradeline, Rafah will work on the basis of a unilateral flow,

for exporting goods to Egypt and nothing can enter from Egypt to Gaza, as these trucks pass from Karam Abo Salem crossing (Kerem Shalom crossing), which is between Israel-Gaza and Egypt-Israel and controlled by Israel. (See figure 4 & 5)

Finally, regarding the security, the PA are responsible for preventing the movement of weapons and explosive at Rafah border, ensure the baggage limits regulations for passenger as applied by the GoI, and providing the third party a list of names of the workers at Rafah crossing that will be shared with the GoI and their concerns must be taken into account (APRC, 2005). This mechanism stayed in full effect from 2005 till 2007 and during these 2 years the Rafah border was opened for 24 hours a day and more than 400,000 individuals passed the RCP (Peoples, 2012).

*Figure 4 – Kerem Shalom Crossing*



*Source: Google Maps*

*Figure 5 – Kerem Shalom Crossing*



*Source: Safer World Report, 2017*

The situation got complicated in 2007, after Hamas won the Parliamentary elections in 2006 and took the majority of the seats, and then in June 2007 Hamas forcefully took over Gaza strip after a military conflict between them and Fatah (Palestinian political party, rivals of Hamas, and the one which formed the PA), which led to the fleeing of PA appointed staff in Rafah to Ramallah and Hamas affiliates took over and appointed a new director for Rafah crossing (Migdalovitz, 2010). This led to the issuance of an official closure of the borders from the Egyptian side as decided from the Egyptian government under Mubarak as they saw that this complicated the legal status of the RCP (Peoples, 2012). While it led the EU to suspend its mission due to their unwillingness to engage in dialogue with Hamas, which is listed as a terrorist group (EU CSDP, 2012). Also, what made things worse is that Israel imposed a land, sea, and air blockade on Gaza in June 2007 due to security concerns (OCHA) (See figure 6).

**Figure 6 – Gaza’s Blockade**



This has put Egypt between two hells, the pressure of maintaining good relationship with the neighboring Jewish state, “a friendship which opens the door to more than 2 billion US dollars of American aid” (Shenker, 2010), to close the borders in order to help Israel fight Hamas, and the Arab solidarity and public anger from the other side to open the borders. This led to opening Rafah on an ad hoc basis, opening it only for humanitarian aids between 2007 and 2010 (Peoples, 2012). This blockade had a lot of consequences for Egypt, most importantly, the tunnel industry connecting between Sinai and Gaza Strip. In June 2010, Israel eased the blockade on Gaza and allowed some items to enter (like food supplies, health materials, water, sanitation, etc.), with a further plan on easing the blockade more, as a response to international pressure. Especially, the Obama administration who saw the blockade as “unsustainable”, after the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) intercepted international activists attempting to break the naval blockade and sending aids to Gaza (Migdalovitz, 2010). As a response from the Egyptian side, with urgency from some pressure groups, NGOs, and civilian population who rallied the streets to force Mubarak to open Rafah on a regular basis, Mubarak issued a decree stating that “the RCP would operate for the movement of people and aid supplies, and that this would be Egypt’s policy ‘indefinitely.’” (Peoples, 2012). Between June 2010 and January 2011, the monthly average number of movements through Rafah reached 19,000 crossings (GISHA, 2020). After Mubarak was overthrown in the 25th of January

revolution, the government proposed that Egypt should permanently open Rafah border permanently to ease the restrictions on Rafah border crossing. However, the reactions and positions of all the stakeholders varied between supporting and opposing the government's proposal.

In general terms, there are four main issues for Egypt's official policy and international commitments. The first concern was the absence of a ratified agreement on the operation of RCP (Peoples, 2012), as since Hamas took control over Rafah, the APRC was worthless as the first clause of the agreement was that PA officials are responsible for the border from the Palestinian side. The second concern is the Egyptian authorities' non-stop skepticism towards Hamas, as being an offshoot of the biggest opposition group for the government, the Muslim Brotherhood (Abu-Amr, 1994) and considering Hamas' political platform as illegal. The third concern was the Egyptian PA diplomatic relation, as they both have reservations towards the armed resistance of Hamas and they both distrust Hamas' exclusive handling of the Rafah border (Peoples, 2012). The fourth and final obstacle is the maintenance of the vision of a two-state solution, as Egypt doesn't want to normalize the relations with the PA without having a comprehensive peace settlement, "as such a move would imply restating Egyptian administrative authority over the Gaza Strip." While Egypt does not want to inherit the political, economic, and social problems of 1.5 million people in Gaza (Peoples, 2012).

### ***3.2. Sinai, the local Bedouin tribes and terrorism: a complex entrenchment of insurgency and mistrust***

Sinai has always been a fertile land for terrorism, and this dates back to the 1967 war when Israelis occupied Sinai. Focusing on the reasons behind that, first of all, the 1978 Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel and the demilitarization process, which limited, reduced and prohibited military existence in specific parts adjacent to Rafah border. The demilitarization process has divided Sinai into 4 zones on the basis of the 1978 Peace Treaty.

*"Zone A, the westernmost area situated between the Suez Canal and the east coast of the Gulf of Suez, has a presence of up to 22, 000 armed soldiers. Zone B, the central zone, has an Egyptian army presence of up to 4,000 personnel, but with no long-range weapons. Zone C, running parallel to the international border at Rafah, is occupied solely by a police force, not totaling more than 750 men. The fourth area, zone D, is located in the Gaza Strip and runs adjacent to the Rafah border with a demarcated width of three kilometers. This zone is subject to frequent bombardment by Israel as it is the principal location of tunnels connecting Egypt with Gaza." (Peoples, 2012). (See figure 7).*

The main issue for the Egyptian military is Zone C, as the manpower and weaponry used according to the accords of the treaty is not sufficient for the military to effectively combat terrorism and close the tunnels, which led to hundreds of terrorist attacks focused in this area.

*Figure 7 – Sinai's Zone Division*



*Source: Laub, 2013*

Secondly, the troubled relation between the Egyptian government and the local Bedouin tribes and the long-standing grievances they have towards the government due to their marginalization and the government failure to address the developmental needs of the tribes (Idris, 2017). Focusing on the problem of the tribes, no government under all presidents of Egypt was able to win the local tribes of Sinai. “Sadat, Mubarak, the post-2011 Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), Morsi and El-Sisi have consistently pursued policies that marginalize Bedouin tribes in Sinai socially, economically and politically” (Idris, 2017). Some of the examples of these policies are that locals were not issued permits to own land, they were not allowed to vote until 2007, they were not allowed to join the army, and most importantly the limited investment in development (Walton, 2012). The lack of investment and high unemployment rates were the driving forces for the locals to work in the tunnel industry between Sinai and Gaza (Gilbert, 2011), which was estimated to bring USD 300 million to Sinai annually (Walton, 2012). “Bedouins’ association to the tunnel industry tends to be economically rather than politically motivated.” (Peoples, 2012). These tunnels were used for various reasons, started with trading goods, or visiting family members on the other side of the border (Peoples, 2012), as there are strong ties between Bedouin tribes and Gaza based on kinship and tribal loyalties (Idris, 2017). Especially in 2007, with the start of the Israeli

blockade on Gaza, as it made the tunnels and smuggling the primary mean for goods to enter Gaza (Gold, 2016). However, after a while it was used to smuggle weapons, drugs, human trafficking, and other illegal stuff (Dentice, 2018), which made it one of the primary focuses for the military and the Egyptian government.

Since the infamous moment of the assassination of President Anwar El Sadat in 1981 by Muslim extremists, led by Khalid Islambouli, as a reaction to the Peace Treaty signed with Israel, seeing it as treachery (Fahmy, 2011), Egypt has faced three waves of armed violence and terrorist attacks. The first wave started during the late 1980s-early 1990s during Mubarak's rule, dominated by Al Jama'a Al-Islamiya, a Sunni extremist group, which operated in Cairo and Upper Egypt and it led to hundreds of deaths. While the second wave was during the mid-2000s, also during Mubarak's rule, dominated by Al-Tawhid wal-Gihad, a militant jihadist group which was originally founded in Jordan, and it operated in Sinai following the Western intervention in Iraq (Safer World, 2017). Finally, the third and most violent wave, which started during and after the Arab Uprising in 2011, dominated by Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdes (ABM), operating in Sinai, specifically in North Sinai.

The 2011 revolution was the trigger for terrorism in Sinai, with the above-mentioned tensions, not coming as a surprise, the Bedouins were among the first to rise up against Mubarak (Idris, 2017). They burnt down police stations and chased down security personnel (Yaari, 2012). Furthermore, the temporary police and other security forces withdrawal during the revolution, alongside the Libyan revolution overthrowing Gaddafi making a whole arsenal available for the public, facilitated the insurgency and the growth of militant Islam in Sinai (Colling, 2015). The literature suggests that the loyalty of the Bedouin population was divided, some of them fought with Jihadi groups "not out of genuine conviction and belief in the militant/Islamist ideology but rather out of anger and frustration towards Cairo" (Rageh, 2013). Also, ABM, which was the dominant militant group at that time presented itself as a defender of local interests and this made it gain sympathies and support from some tribes (Gold, 2016). While on the other hand, "some tribal leaders did not encourage violent extremism and, indeed, the current Islamist insurgency challenges the Bedouin tribal structure and wellbeing" (Graham-Harrison, 2015). However, those who did not support the militant groups, did not also fight against them with the military and they stayed in a neutral position. Until ABM pledged loyalty to ISIS and started killing alleged spies and threatening tribal leaders, hostility towards the militant groups among Bedouin tribes started growing (Ibid.: 3) and in April 2015,



some Bedouin tribes attacked ABM positions in retaliation for the execution of a youth and a tribal sheikh (Colling, 2015).

#### **4. Analysis of the three different regimes**

In this section I will be analyzing the responses and reactions of the different ruling regimes in Egypt on Rafah border, regarding the selected terrorist attacks that took place during their stints as presidents of Egypt. Moreover, I will be giving a contextualized background about the stakeholders and their different positions within each period to clarify the whole image and the motives behind each action taken regarding the border. I will be starting with Mubarak focusing on the period between 2006 till 2010. Then I will be discussing the Interim government of the SCAF which took over after Mubarak was overthrown between 2011-2012, then Morsi's one-year rule between mid-2012 to mid-2013. Then I will be finalizing with the Interim government with the former Supreme Constitutional Court chief justice Adly Mansour as acting president between late 2012 and early 2013, and El-Sisi between 2013 till 2017.

##### ***4.1. Mubarak's era: Exogenous pressures***

During Mubarak's rule, the position and strategy towards the Palestinian cause and Rafah has changed a lot between the early 2000s and 2007, when Hamas took control over Gaza. The concept of supporting Palestine and the antagonism and hostility towards Israel was not only accepted and tolerated by Mubarak, but it was even used as a method to boost his popularity and legitimize his rule in Egypt (El Gindy, 2012). However, due to international and internal pressures, alongside some events taking place during that period, most significantly, the so called "War on Terror" by the US in 2001, the Palestinian Intifada (Uprising) which started in 2001 till 2005, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Lebanon war in 2006, and most importantly, Hamas taking control of Gaza in 2007 and the Gaza war in 2009 (Ibid.: 172). All these events and pressures shifted Mubarak's position in to becoming the US' most important asset in the Middle East in counter-terrorism and in the Arab-Israeli peace-building process (Ibid.: 173). Mubarak started to take some decisions in the interest of Israel and the US, which led to his growing unpopularity and waning domestic legitimacy, and he was seen as being at the behest of both countries (Ibid.: 173).

Focusing on terrorism during Mubarak and how it affected Rafah border, the first major incident that I will be discussing is the Dahab's attack on the 24th of April 2006, which led to the death of 30 people and injuring more than 115, among them 20 foreigner (Botha, 2006).

This incident took place on the official Egyptian celebration of Israel's withdrawal from Sinai, and the former Minister of Interior Habib al-Adly said on the Egyptian television that "I do not think it is a coincidence that this attack happens amid celebration of Sinai Liberation Day. The other two attacks in Taba and Sharm el Sheik also took place during celebration of national occasions; that raises question marks." (Slackman, 2006). This claim made by El Adly shows that the government saw a pattern to the attacks and believed that they were not random ones. Adding to that, the three incidents were all situated in Sinai, which is a well-known destination for Israeli tourists, as according to the 1979 Peace Treaty, Israelis are allowed to travel without visas to Zone C in Sinai, which includes the three previously targeted places (Taba, Sharm El-Sheikh, and Dahab) (Botha, 2006).

The Egyptian government considered that 'local centers' of terrorism inspired by the violence in Iraq and the Palestinian territories were responsible for these attacks. Supporting their theory, Ayad Said Saleh, a Palestinian refugee was found to be one of the bombers, who accidentally killed himself while carrying out the attack, and the Minister of Interior in a statement announced that "he has been motivated by the deteriorating situation in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip (from which his relatives had fled in 1967)." (Botha, 2006). Also, not surprisingly, after the 3 attacks, security forces accused Bedouins for being associated with the attacks and started arrest campaigns, some of them got imprisoned and others were released, and this was also a huge factor of the alienation of Bedouins and their growing anger towards the government (Ibid.: 13).

Regarding the Rafah border, one day after the attack, Palestinian security forces seized a vehicle filled with explosives at the border, and according to Palestinian sources, militants unsuccessfully tried to ram one explosives-laden car in to the Rafah crossing but they were able to stop them (OSAC, 2006). Despite all these incidents and casualties, the Rafah border was not closed, and it remained operating normally, as according to the EU BAM report on the 3rd of May, 2006, which is less than a week after the incidents, it states that "Rafah passenger terminal continues to operate under the supervision of the EUBAM with hundreds of passengers crossing daily between Gaza and Sinai." However, on the 25th of June 2006, after the capture of an Israeli soldier by Hamas, the border was nearly entirely close, opening for 83 days and closed for 268 days (EUBAM, 2007), until 9 June 2007, after Hamas took over Gaza and Israel imposed the full blockade on Gaza, the border closed permanently by Egypt, limited

to “patients, religious pilgrims, foreign residents or residents of Gaza with foreign visas including students” (GISHA, 2020).

This shows that during this period, Mubarak was not moved with the concept of national security, as much as being pressured by Israel and the US in order to serve their agendas, and as mentioned above being at the behest of both countries. Adding to this, it is clear that he did not have full sovereignty over the border, as logically speaking, a terrorist attack with bad casualties, alongside an alleged attack on the border itself did not lead to the closure of the border, but capturing an Israeli soldier did, this clarifies who was in control and who was the decision-maker regarding the border at that time.

Moving on to the second incident, the 2008 Rafah border breach. In January 23, 2008, after nearly 6 months of the closure of the border and blockade on Gaza, Hamas militants used 17 explosive charges before dawn to blow up parts of the fence on Rafah border. Passengers on foot, bicycles, and pickup trucks crossed the border to buy medical and food supplies, gasoline, cement, and other supplies that have been cut off from the blockade (Erlanger, 2008). This incident can be labeled as a terrorist attack by many people, and as a threat to national security as well, surprisingly, this was not the case. When people started moving across the borders, the Egyptian security forces lined up on one side of the border and Hamas forces lined up on the other side and none of them interfered (NBC, 2008). Adding to this, Mubarak said in a press conference, “I told them: ‘Let them come in to eat and buy food, then they go back, as long as they are not carrying weapons” (Erlanger, 2008). For Hamas, it was a definite victory to ease the situation for Gazans, and even Fatah members praised Hamas for taking this action (NBC, 2008), and Prime Minister Ismail Haniya called for an urgent meeting with Egypt to work out a new arrangement for the border crossing (Erlanger, 2008). On the other hand, Israel demanded Egypt to regain control over the border, and the US expressed its concern about the breach, however, Mubarak assured them that the border will be closed quickly (NBC,2008). It took a few days and then the border was closed again.

Nevertheless, the decision taken by Egypt on this incident, by not opposing the breach or stopping it is an uncommon one. A breach of any border by a militant group using explosives can turn in to war, or at least to a strong reaction. However, as mentioned above, this was not the case. There are some explanations for this decision, firstly, closing the borders and aiding Israel in their blockade on Gaza raised public discontent in Egypt and have put the government under pressure to help impoverished Gazans (Erlanger, 2008). The second explanation is that

this incident was agreed upon before it happens between Hamas and Egypt to make it seem as Egypt had no choice in it, so they are not violating their agreement with Israel and not standing against the US' will.

Adding to the above-mentioned explanations, at that time, the US administration under Obama was not fully supporting the Israeli blockade on Gaza and saw it as an unsustainable solution (Migdalovitz, 2010). Even though, a Hamas official claimed that there was no prior agreement with Egypt and it was a “unilateral move” in response to the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, it still does not make sense to accept a breach of your borders with no response, especially that Egypt is well-known for taking the border control seriously (NBC,2006). I believe that the decision was entirely driven by providing the humanitarian needs to Gazans without defying Israel and as a response to public pressure in Egypt. As, during this period, it was seen that Egypt was helping Israel against Hamas, and it was reflected in mostly keeping Rafah closed all the time, helping Israel in restricting the flow of goods and people into and out of Gaza (Monshipouri, 2019).

However, after this incident the border was entirely closed again, and keeping the Egyptian side of Rafah closed during the Gaza war in 2009 was the most damaging decision taken by Mubarak, and it became a “rallying cry for established opposition groups like the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the newly formed protest movements.” (El Gindy, 2012). The non-stop internal pressure by the opposition groups, most prominently the Muslim Brotherhood, and external pressure from Hamas' camp, Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria (Peoples, 2012), alongside the US under Obama's administration, led Mubarak to take the decision of opening the border indefinitely for the movement of the people and aid supplies. But it was too late, as he was overthrown by the people later in February 2011 and the SCAF took control until holding a democratic presidential election.

#### *4.2. Interim government and Morsi: Endogenous pressures*

Regarding the SCAF rule, the situation remained remarkably similar to how it was under Mubarak, especially the close ties between Egypt and the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Gulf Countries, and the hostility towards Hamas. Even though during the transition phase the interim government (with the MB and Islamist having the majority of the seats) proposed that Egypt ought to permanently open the border, the above-mentioned concerns in section 3.1, alongside

the SCAF's opposition stopped the decision from being implemented and it remained operating on an ad hoc basis till the Presidential elections were held in mid-2012.

*“This should come as no surprise given that the military in general and the intelligence apparatus in particular, have continued to control Egyptian foreign and national security policy. Islamists have had little say in governing the country during the transition much less in formulating foreign policy.” (El Gindy, 2012).*

Moreover, during the revolution and the interim government in 2011, the conflict increased in Sinai and the deterioration of the security environment pushed the military to take extensive measures to fight terrorism. It started with launching the first anti-terror campaign in Sinai “Operation Eagle”, as a response to the cross-border attack that took place in August 2011, killing eight Israelis and five Egyptian soldiers (Sabry, 2014). The operation was carried out by sending 2,500 troops, 250 armored cars, tanks and helicopters, and this was after having an agreement with Israel to permit more forces in Sinai, not to violate the 1979 Peace Treaty accords between them, and that whenever the operation is finished, they will leave Sinai again (Cook, 2011). This operation took place under the SCAF rule in late 2011 till early 2012 when the MB came into power.

The MB's position towards the Palestinian cause dates back to 1936, when they sent fighters to support the Palestinians in their war against Britain (Helfont, 2010). Ever since then, the MB, despite of being oppressed and mostly imprisoned, since the late 1950s when they started to get radicalized by Hassan El-Bannah, the founder of the MB, they had to express their agendas subversively, but they still supported the Palestinian cause by all the possible means (Peoples, 2012). However, the situation changed after the 25th of revolution, when the MB became a normalized party, and were able to express their agendas freely to the public. During the transitional phase, the MB tended to normalize the relation between Egypt and Hamas government and moved to have a foreground internal political discussion on border policy at Rafah (Ibid.: 15).

The MB's strongest opposition was towards having an international arrangement on Rafah border, as they believe that the agreement should be conducted between Egypt and Palestine, and the inclusion of Israel in the negotiations is a clear recognition of the state which they totally oppose. In one of the interviews with Dr. Essam El-Erian, the vice chairman of the MB stated that:

*“All of the agreement [is problematic]! There must be an exclusively Egyptian-Palestinian agreement. Israel is putting pressure so not to provide the Palestinians with a safe passageway for goods or individuals through the Rafah Crossing.” (Peoples, 2012).*

Furthermore, the MB won the majority of the seats in the Parliamentary elections of 2011-2012 and then the party’s candidate Mohamed Morsi won the presidential elections in June 2012. The Islamist government showed its support to “its kin government in the Strip” (Hamed, 2014), as in March 2012, Egypt’s Parliament voted unanimously to expel the Israeli ambassador in Cairo and declared boycotting the Zionist entity (Ibid.: 158). Then a few months later, when Morsi became the President and appointed Hesham Qandil as the Prime Minister, he initiated the breakage of the Israeli blockade by visiting Gaza. Regarding the border, it was mostly open, allowing the movement of the people in and out of Gaza (Ibid.: 159), it was opened 8 hours a day, 6 days a week (Sherhood, 2012).

Since Morsi took control in 2012 till 2013, he attempted to shift Sinai’s policy from an adversarial approach to having engaged dialogues with Bedouin tribes (Breen, 2013). However, the security and military personnel strongly disagreed with the de-militarization approach and “viewed Morsi as soft on terrorism” (Aziz, 2017). Adding to this, the ongoing terrorist attacks on pipelines carrying natural gas to Israel from Sinai, alongside the 5th of August 2012 terrorist attack worsened the situation for Morsi and made it harder to persuade the military to depart from a militarized governance model in Sinai (Ibid.: 4).

Focusing on the 5th of August terrorist attack; masked gunmen opened fire on an Egyptian Army checkpoint near Rafah border, leading to the death of 15 Egyptian soldiers, and stealing two armored cars to storm the border and infiltrate to Israel (Fahim & El Sheikh, 2012). As a reaction, Morsi used the attack to his own advantage at first and took it as an opportunity to bolster his authority by forcing the resignation of many military seniors, on top of them the former Defense Minister Tantawi, and appointed El-Sisi as the new Minister of Defense (Lansford, 2019). Then he offered condolences to the victims’ families on national television after meeting with senior generals and security officials and then he added that “there’s no room to appease this treachery, this aggression and this criminality, Security forces would extend “full control” over the area, Sinai is safe.” (Fahim & El Sheikh, 2012).

Adding to this, Egyptian officials stated that the armed groups infiltrated the country from Gaza through the tunnels (Al Jazeera, 2012). As a response, officials from Hamas announced that “the tunnels used for smuggling between Egypt and Gaza had been temporary

closed as a response to the attack”, and the Hamas Interior Ministry stated that “Palestinian resistance factions are committed to fighting only against the Israeli occupation, and they launch their operations only from the Palestinian territories.” (Fahim & El Sheikh, 2012). This in a way shows that Hamas wanted to clear its name from the incident and cut any pointed finger at them. However, the attack still raised public discontent, and Morsi’s opponents alongside military officials directly linked the policy of an opened border to the massacre and the possibility of having more attacks in the future if the situation remained like this (Gold, 2013).

Regarding the border, due to the public and international pressure, especially from Israel as the militants attempted to attack the Karam Abu Salem crossing, and from the US, officials announced the temporary closure of Rafah border (Fahim & El Sheikh, 2012). Adding to this, the military launched the second anti-terror campaign “Operation Eagle II”, later changed to “Operation Sinai”, which aimed at fighting terrorism in Sinai and destroying the tunnels (Watanabe, 2015). Despite the effort done to destroy the tunnels, smuggling and underground trade continued normally, and given the sensitivity of the military operation, international reports provided mixed information “with some documenting intense operations and others quoting witnesses saying all was quiet” (Gold, 2013). However, the border was only closed for two weeks and it was re-opened and operated normally on August 25th (Elyan, 2012).

Despite Morsi’s efforts in convincing the military to depart from the militarized governance model in Sinai, and his support to the Palestinian cause and Hamas in Gaza, with the ongoing conflict and mistrust between both Morsi and the military, alongside this attack and others, Morsi had no choice other than abiding by the Military’s decision of the closure of the border after the attack, following the adversary approach, and restricting the movement on the borders. Keeping in mind, the strategic considerations regarding Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel and related military aid from the US (Elyan, 2012), and the on-going opposition of the SCAF and the Supreme Constitutional Court to Morsi and the MB (Lansford, 2019).

#### ***4.3. Interim government and El-Sisi: Security Crackdown***

After public discontent and concerns about Morsi’s competence invaded the public in the first half of 2013, an estimated number of 14 million Egyptians rallied the streets in different cities of Egypt in June 30, 2013 and violent clashes between the adherents and opposition of the MB scored deaths and hundreds of injuries, which led to El-Sisi (the Minister of Defense

during that time) ordering Morsi to be taken in to custody on the 3rd of July and forming an interim government with the former Supreme Constitutional Court chief justice Adly Mansour as acting president (Lansford, 2019). What is worth noting is that the Interim government during that period was just acting as a front for the SCAF (headed by El-Sisi) who took all the decisions during from mid-2013 until mid-2014 when El-Sisi won the presidential elections.

El-Sisi before being appointed as the Minister of Defense by Morsi was the Director of the Military intelligence agency which was directly connected to the circle of decision on Rafah border during the interim government in 2011 (Tahrir Institute, 2015). His position regarding the Rafah border followed the same handbook of the military and SCAF, as he was raised in its school and abided to its principles, and this justifies his decisions taken regarding Rafah border during his rule in Egypt that I will be tackling later on in this section. His agenda was the same as the SCAF's which focused on carrying out three main tasks "(1) securing the borderland against national threats, and (2) securing the borderland against terror networks, and (3) terminating the tunnel industry between Rafah and Gaza" (Peoples, 2012).

Moreover, the rate of violence in Sinai escalated drastically after Morsi was ousted and several security checkpoints were attacked, and the military intelligence immediately announced that the militants conducting the attacks are affiliates with the MB, Bedouins, and al Qaeda (Lansford, 2019), who legitimated their ideology and political battles by using Morsi's forced removal (El-Dabh, 2013). The terrorist attack that I will be discussing is the 19th of August 2013 attack, when Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdes, ambushed a checkpoint in Rafah killing 24 soldiers and injuring tens of them (Sabry, 2014). This incident happened less than a week after the military cleared the MB and Morsi's supporters' camps violently leading to the deaths of more than 800 protestors on the 14th of August 2013 (Lansford, 2019). This made the Egyptian military make the connection between both incidents, pointing to statements made by Muslim Brotherhood leaders "to insist that Morsi's movement has been behind this unrest" (Gold, 2013). For example, Safwat Hegazy, a television preacher and one of the biggest supports of the MB and Morsi threatened to defend Morsi violently by saying "whoever sprays Morsi with water, we will spray with blood" (Trager, 2016). This gave the chance to the military to capture MB leaders and send them to prison to get rid of any opposition (Al Jazeera, 2014).



Regarding the border, El-Sisi ordered the entire closure of Rafah border right after the removal of Morsi, out of concern that violent Islamists from Sinai and Gaza might interfere, and the military effectively sealed the tunnels leaving estimated fewer than ten operational (Gold, 2013). It was only opened for humanitarian cases and no passage of any trade trucks. However, after the abovementioned attack, the border was closed indefinitely (Al Jazeera, 2013). This approach taken by El-Sisi can be described as taking no chances for any threats from Gaza, which is ruled by the MB allies Hamas, relying on the support of the people who are torn apart from terrorism in Sinai and political instability. The decision can be justified in one sentence, “the close organizational connections between the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Hamas, and the current confrontation between the Egyptian military and ex-Brotherhood regime figures” (Isaac, 2014).

Ever since then, the borders have been entirely closed until mid-July 2014, when Israel launched a military operation on Gaza after the Palestinians were forming a unity government between Hamas and the PA (Hasan, 2018). Several political parties and revolutionary groups in Egypt, alongside the UN secretary general urged El-Sisi to open the border permanently to help Gaza against the Israeli aggression (Ahram Online, 2014). Which led Egypt to open it for less than a day, and only for Egyptians and critically injured Palestinians, who were only 11 allowed to cross the border and then closed it again the next morning without providing any reason to the press or any announcements (Abaza, 2014). Moreover, according to the UNHCR reports, between October 2014 and October 2015, the border was opened for a total of 37 days, because of the deteriorating security situation in Sinai especially around Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid which made the coordination of safe passage extremely difficult (UNHCR, 2015). In 2016, El-Sisi said that the crossing will be opened more regularly, making particular reference to public occasions (Ayton, 2016).

However, the situation remained as it is, opening randomly and for humanitarian reasons, with no tradeline operating, until 2017. After tremendous efforts from Egypt, in October 2017, Hamas and Fatah, signed a reconciliation deal in Cairo, as they both agreed that the Rafah border would be operated by PA officials by November 1st in order to open the border and operate normally (Al Jazeera, 2017). However, the Egyptian officials told the delegations of both parties that the border will fully open unless security in Sinai is restored (Saleh, 2017). However, tensions between both Hamas and Fatah were not solved afterwards,

alongside the ongoing terrorist attacks in Sinai made it difficult for Rafah to operate normally and till our day now it still operates randomly and for humanitarian cases only.

Regarding the military response, after Morsi was ousted, El-Sisi launched the third anti-terror campaign “Operation Desert Storm” after El-Sisi asked the people in Egypt to rally the street as a popular mandate to fight terrorism (Tahrir Institute, 2019). Then he launched “Operation Sinai” in 2014 and “Operation Martyr’s Right” in 2015, all aimed at confronting terrorism and destruction of the tunnels by filling them with water (Dentice, 2018). These operations took place after co-operation with Israel, as many accords of Camp David have been effectively suspended, and Israel gained permission from Egypt as well to launch attacks in Sinai against militant groups with cooperation with the Egyptian forces in Sinai (Sabry, 2014).

#### *4.4. Converging and divergent paths*

From the three different regimes, there is a common trend that could be followed throughout the three eras, which is militant attacks leads to security crackdown (Aziz, 2017). The Egyptian government’s coercive instead of collaborative method of governing Sinai, has been the biggest reason behind the insurgency in Sinai, as using the reactive approach of trying to prevent the next attack instead of resolving the underlying problems that fuel the militancy and terrorism from the beginning (Aziz, 2017). This can be seen from the military anti-terror campaigns that were launched during the three regimes, and the large-scale arrests, detention of Bedouins, and collateral damage to civilians (loss of life, injuries, destruction of homes and properties) (Idris, 2017).

Furthermore, the relation between Sinai’s security and Rafah border control became crystal clear after analyzing the different attacks and reaction towards the border, throughout different ruling regimes in Egypt. Accordingly, the four main factors affecting the decision of the three ruling regimes are, (1) The security situation in Sinai, in connection to terrorist attacks and insurgency (2) The US and Israeli agreements, in regard to the 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel, and the US’ military fund (3) The relation between the ruling regime in Cairo and Gaza, either it is Hamas or the PA controlling the Strip (4) Internal and external pressures. The answers during the three different periods constitute different configurations and prioritization of these four elements.

The first point, which is the security situation in Sinai, the three regimes took the same path of the adversarial approach. Even though, during Morsi’s rule, he tried to have more

dialogues with the Bedouin, and promised to end discrimination against them, but the military strongly disagreed with having a demilitarized approach in Sinai (Breen, 2013). Which at the end of the day led to using the same adversarial approach, keeping in mind that the military is the strongest institution in Egypt, and that the military and the intelligence apparatus have always been in control of the Egyptian foreign and national security policy (El Gindy, 2012). Also, during El-Sisi, he considered development projects in Sinai, by building tunnels linking Sinai to Ismailia and Port-Said trying to connect Sinai to the nation's economic grid, and also discussed creating free-trade zones in Sinai to create job opportunities (Aziz, 2017). These development plans went hand in hand with the military intervention. However, as a huge portion of the development funds to Egypt come from the EU and the US, their interest was focused on preventing attacks against Israel rather than promoting sustainable development, which is the main cause of violence, so till our day now, they are not implemented (Ibid.: 2). This moves us to the second point, which is the US and Israel's agreements.

During the three regimes, the decision of closing the border was affected by two major agreements, the 1979 Peace treaty between Egypt and Israel and the US Military Aid. Mubarak, as mentioned above, worked at the behest of both countries, closing the borders when an Israeli soldier was captured and not when a terrorist attack took place in Sinai, and he opened it when the US administration under Obama urged him to open it in 2010. However, during Morsi it was not significantly different, as Hamas hoped that the MB rule in Egypt would flourish their period, but the strategic considerations involving Egypt's Peace Treaty with Israel and related military aid from the US made this strong tie restricted in one way or another (Elyan, 2012). On one hand he violated the AMA agreement, which Egypt was not part of, but still abided to it during Mubarak and El-Sisi, by operating Rafah border normally while Hamas are in control from the Gazan side, and on the other hand when a terrorist attack took place, he had to close the border due to the military, public, and international pressure on him. During El-Sisi, the relation between Egypt and Israel was flourishing, as he had strategic relations with them when he was the head of military intelligence, and he resumed the military and security coordination when he came into power. Additionally, he maintained this positive relationship with Israel in order to protect Egypt's relation with the west, particularly the US to maintain the military aid (Elmenshawy, 2014).

Regarding the third point which is the relation between the ruling regime in Egypt and Gaza, it is clear how during Mubarak the situation changed 180 degrees when Hamas took over Rafah border and it became indefinitely closed. During Morsi, despite all the internal and external challenges he was facing to close the borders, he kept it opened as much as possible, especially for the first half of 2013, in order to support his kin government in Gaza. Finally, El-Sisi did not take any chances, as he closed the border at once after overthrowing Morsi, fearing from any intervention from his allies in Gaza. While in regards to internal and external pressures, it occurred during the three eras, during Mubarak he was pressured by the opposition groups, Hamas, Iran, and Syria to open the borders and break the siege on Gaza in 2009 during the Gaza war. While Morsi was pressured by the opposition groups, revolutionary groups, the military, Supreme Justice Court, Israel, and the US to close the borders and destroy the tunnels. Finally, El-Sisi was pressured by some revolutionary groups, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon alongside other regional leaders in 2014, to open the borders after the military raid by Israel in Gaza.

## **5. Conclusions**

To conclude, the four main elements which affected Rafah border since it started operating in 2005 till 2017 during the three different ruling regimes are the security situation in Sinai, international agreements, the complex relationship between the ruling government in Egypt and Gaza, and the internal and external pressures. These elements were prioritized and configured differently throughout the three eras depending on the background of each actor. However, the common trend that could be followed throughout all the different periods is that regardless of who is in power, the military and the intelligence apparatus have always been in control of the Egyptian foreign and national security policy. The military always followed the same agenda which focuses on (1) securing the borderland against national threats, (2) securing the borderland against terror networks, (3) and terminating the tunnel industry between Rafah and Gaza.

The latter conclusion justifies the decisions taken on Rafah border throughout the different periods, despite the efforts of the first non-military president in Egypt (Morsi), regardless of his or the MB's real intentions or hidden agenda behind opening the borders, while having full parliamentary and presidential powers, they did not succeed on keeping it entirely opened for the whole time and he had to abide by the military's decisions and

international agreements. However, the situation on Rafah was better during Morsi's rule compared to any other period, but it was not as good as the MB and Hamas expected or wanted.

Moreover, it also became clear that the security situation in Sinai has contributed significantly in the closure of the Rafah border. While digging deeper to the root causes of the deterioration of the security situation in Sinai, it became clear that the alienation of the Bedouins and under-development of Sinai alongside its geographical dynamics, act as the major reasons behind Sinai being a fertile land for terrorism.

Regarding the limitations, the lack of data on Sinai and Rafah was the major obstacle I faced while conducting my research. The data during Mubarak and especially till 2007 was easily reached as the EUBAM were issuing monthly reports about the number of passengers and crossings and if there was any conflict on the border. However, after the mission was suspended, the data became extremely difficult to reach. Especially during El-Sisi's era, as in October 2013, the military imposed a media blackout in Sinai, and the communication networks, phone lines, and internet has been cut off for six to twelve hours per day (Aziz, 2017). This decision was implemented after El-Sisi passed a law with the absence of the Parliament in August 2013, where article 35 states that "the press is forbidden from contradicting the government's account of terrorist attacks" (El-Dabh, 2015).

Besides the lack of data, the mixed information from different sources and not having any official government releases was another obstacle I faced during the research. As it was mentioned by Zack Gold who was conducting a research on security in Sinai, "Given the nature of Sinai and the sensitivity of military operations in particular, Egyptian and international reports provided mixed information" (Gold, 2013). Adding to this, how the media outlets report the same incident in totally different ways, the best example of this is how Al Jazeera, which is a Qatari channel supporting the MB reports the attacks in Sinai, and any other Egyptian media (Pro-government) announces it. Finally, the research could be improved if there was a possibility to conduct field-research and check the situation on the borders, or get in touch with any official from Egypt and Palestine to understand the real-life situation in Rafah, Sinai, and Gaza.

Regarding the further research, there are plenty of studies conducted on Sinai, the local Bedouins, and terrorism on one hand, and Rafah on the other hand. However, the connection between the four elements is missing in most of the literature, and I have tried as much as

possible to draw this connection in my study, but due to the limit in resources and being restricted by a word count I was only able to focus on the Egyptian side. I would suggest academics and researchers, including me in the future to draw this connection on both the Egyptian and Palestinian sides, as well as highlighting the Israeli and International community's role in the conflict, as Rafah border is one of the most complex borders in the Middle East and even in the world, in regards to its geographical, historical, and political nature. When Palestine, Israel, and the international community are integrated within the research, the bigger picture and the complexity of the conflict will become clearer.

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