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Egypt Sharm el-Sheikh Bombings (ESSB)

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Voice: (703) 370-2962 Fax: (703) 370-1571
Email: info@intelcenter.com Web: www.intelcenter.com
PO Box 22572, Alexandria, VA 22304-9257 USA

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NOTE:

THIS IS A DYNAMIC WORKING DOCUMENT AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE. Questions or comments can be directed to Ben Venzke at bvenzke@intelcenter.com or bvenzke@leo.gov. The latest release can be found at <http://www.intelcenter.com>.

OVERVIEW

At around 0115 local time on 23 Jul. 2005, two vehicular bombs and another explosive device in a bag detonated in the Old Market area of Sharm el-Sheikh and Namaa Bay. The first blast occurred in the Old Market area where a vehicular bomb detonated. Minutes later a suicide bomber drove one vehicular bomb into the Ghazala Garden Hotel in Namaa Bay. The third device detonated at a beachfront parking lot and shuttle stop used by tourists in Namaa Bay. At least 89 people were killed and at least 200 injured. Due to the amount of destruction at the Ghazala Garden Hotel and other sites, the death toll is expected to rise as recovery efforts continue. At least 60 of those killed were Egyptians and at least nine were foreigners, including two Britons, two Italians, one Ukrainian, one Russian, one Czech, one Dutch citizen and an Israeli of Arab descent. Britons, Dutch, Qataris, Kuwaitis, Saudis, Qataris, Ukrainians, Russians and Egyptians were among the injured.

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

- The timing and target selection of the attacks allowed for maximum casualties by making sure the largest number of people were either in the hotel asleep or targeted at nightlife spots in the area which would have still been busy with tourists.
- Area is heavily frequented by European and other tourists. Even much of the staff in the area are European and other foreigners who work there for the summer.
- The attacks came on the 53rd anniversary of the 1952 revolution. Many Egyptians were on an extended holiday weekend in Sharm el-Sheikh and other resorts.

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- The trial of three men suspected of involvement in the Oct. 2004 Taba bombings began on 2 Jul. at the high state security court in Ismailiya, northeast of Cairo. It was due to resume on Sunday, 24 Jul. One of the men is still at large and being tried in absentia.
- Following the lessons learned from the multiple vehicular bombings that occurred during a five-day span in Nov. 2003 in Istanbul, Turkey. There is the possibility that additional attacks will be executed in Sharm el-Sheikh by the same or related cells.
- There is the possibility of additional follow-on attacks timed to occur in other countries in the coming days or weeks. Al-Qaeda has written about the benefit of varying the timing of operations in order to increase their impact on the targeted parties.

OLD MARKET

- At around 0115 local time on 23 Jul. 2005, the first blast reportedly occurred in the Old Market area.
- At least 17 people killed, mostly Egyptian workers, sitting at a nearby outdoor coffee shop
- Three minibuses set ablaze

GHAZALA GARDEN HOTEL

- At around 0115 local time on 23 Jul. 2005 a vehicular bomb was driven by a suicide bomber into the front of the Ghazala Garden Hotel minutes after the first blast in the Old Market area.
- The hotel was a 176-room four star resort located in the Namaa Bay area.
- "A suicide car bomber forced the barrier at the entrance of the hotel. A member of the security staff tried to stop him but he sped towards the reception and there was a huge explosion," a Ghazala hotel employee told AFP.
- "There were at least 25 dead in this bombing, most of them Egyptians employees of the hotel because the tourist villas are on the other side of the hotel," a police officer said to AFP.

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QABOUS STREET CAR PARK

- One device apparently detonated in a car park a few hundred meters away from the Ghazala hotel, smashing shopfronts on Qabous street.
- The device was apparently left in a bag near a shuttle stop frequented by tourists.

AL-QAEDA ORGANIZATION IN THE LEVANT AND EGYPT CLAIM

- The Abdullah Azzam Brigades of al-Qaeda Organization in the Levant and Egypt claimed responsibility for the attack on the same day in a written statement saying it executed the attack as a “response against the global evil powers which are spilling the blood of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Chechnya.” It said, “Your brothers, the holy warriors of the martyr Abdullah Azzam Brigades succeeded in launching a smashing attack on the Crusaders, Zionists and the renegade Egyptian regime in Sharm el-Sheikh.”
- The statement said, “We declare it loud and clear that we will not be frightened by the whips of the Egyptian torturers and we will not tolerate violation of our brothers' land of Sinai.”
- The group had also earlier claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in Cairo and a shooting attack on a tourist bus, also in Cairo in Apr. 2005.

HOLY WARRIORS OF EGYPT CLAIM

- Hours after the claim was made by the al-Qaeda Organization in the Levant and Egypt, the Holy Warriors of Egypt [Mujahedi Masr] faxed a statement to newspapers disputing the claim and saying that it was responsible for the attack. The group named five people it said died carrying out seven bombings.
- The group said car bombs were used in Old Market and at the Ghazala Hotel, while five other explosive devices detonated elsewhere in the area.

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RECENT ATTACKS IN EGYPT TARGETING TOURISTS

- Cairo – 30 Apr. 2005 – 0 killed, 7 injured – Suicide Bombing – Tourists near Egyptian Museum
- Cairo – 7 Apr. 2005 – 3 killed – Suicide Bombing – Tourists in Bazaar
- Taba – 7 Oct. 2004 – 34 killed – Vehicular Bombing – Taba Hilton & 2 Beaches

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