

EGYPTIAN GENERAL MOHAMED FAWZI

PART VI: PLANS TO REBUILD EGYPTIAN ARMED FORCES AFTER THE SIX-DAY WAR

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After the stunning defeat of the Egyptian armed forces by the Israelis in the 1967 Six-Day War, Egypt's leadership had to assess how best to reorganize and strengthen their armed forces. For the first time, the perspective of Egyptian military planners is made available to U.S. military readers through CDR Aboul-Enein's exposition of the memoirs of War Minister General Mohamed Fawzi. The first order of business after the 1967 defeat was to designate someone as commander-in-chief of Egypt's armed forces, to which Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel-Nasser appointed Fawzi. In turn, Fawzi had to make necessary and vital decisions regarding the manner in which to rebuild the shattered forces. His memoirs offer deep insight into how Fawzi and Nasser assigned other command positions within Egypt's military. Readers will understand how the two developed an ordered summation of political and military tasks. It was also necessary for the two men to organize other rankings of the armed forces and to name commanders of the various military units.

Ultimately, Fawzi's and Nasser's rebuilding of the Egyptian armed forces, and the directives that went along with its rebuilding, would set the stage for the War of Attrition, which lasted, as Fawzi recounts, from 1967-1970. While preparing for this next phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it was necessary for Nasser and Fawzi to gather up aid and assistance from its allies, particularly the Soviet Union. Through his translation and analysis of Fawzi's memoirs, CDR Aboul-Enein illuminates the robust scale of support that the Soviets provided Egypt after the Six-Day War. After securing military support in the form of essential military equipment, Fawzi's next task was to combine the posts of war minister and commander-in-chief into a single position. This move would become a permanent fixture in Egypt's leadership to this day.

Having had the great privilege of serving as a journal editor at the Naval Postgraduate School and as author of numerous books on American national security and strategic thought, I understand the need to foster greater empathy and understanding, and to thus better advise our leaders. CDR Aboul-Enein has written several important articles for our journal, and he has brought to those writings the very same depth of insight that we find here, derived from his deep understanding of the region. Today, he shares his sources of information with a wider U.S. military audience, in an attempt to educate future leaders within the U.S. armed forces.

— **Barry Scott Zellen**

Editor-in-chief of *The Culture and Conflict Review* and author of *State of Doom: Bernard Brodie, the Bomb, and the Birth of the Bipolar World*; the four-volume series *The Realist Tradition in International Relations: Foundations of Western Order*; and *The Art of War in an Asymmetric World: Strategy for the Post-Cold War Era*

On the evening of 9 June 1967 and through the morning of 10 June, General Mohamed Fawzi sat at the command center in Cairo's Nasr City district. He wrote that he was the most senior officer in the building amidst a military command structure in collapse. Fawzi called this segment of his memoirs "Starting from Zero," in which he recounted the immediate steps he took when granted authority by Nasser to become Egypt's armed forces commander-in-chief.

He saw his immediate tasks as securing the west side of the Suez Canal from further Israeli incursions and getting the army into an orderly withdrawal and demobilization. The latter also meant disarming the returning soldiers and having them report to their respective units. Fawzi assigned the first task to General Saadek Sharaf and the second task to the Military Police Command. Fawzi recounted how the radio was used to issue orders to retreating troops arriving from the Sinai and to guide them to transport depots which would then take them back to their units. A third immediate task was addressing the 9 June arrival of a massive Soviet airlift, which contained a much-needed military resupply of hardware, equipment, and ordnance. This material needed to be off-loaded, stored, and distributed to field units along the west side of the Suez Canal, which Fawzi imagined would be the new defensive line. Airfields needed to be repaired to receive an additional 40 MiG-17 jet fighters from Algeria.

Fawzi relied on many officers who chose to remain at their posts despite the chaos created by the decisive Israeli strike and by the takeover of the Sinai. These men provided Fawzi with a cadre of officers who did not flee in the face of a disintegrating situation. Therefore, he was able to begin to organize the immediate tasks toward stabilizing the Egyptian armed forces. Many of these officers were given orders to form the Suez Canal defensive line using whatever military equipment was necessary. Fawzi wrote that the defensive line was not just necessary for national security reasons but also for the purpose of reassuring the Egyptian public. It was also important to counter Israeli propaganda that claimed Israeli units had crossed the canal and were headed towards Cairo. Fawzi described how his thoughts, and thereby assignment of tasks, became clearer with each passing hour, and they revolved around building the defensive line along the entire length of the canal. By 11 June 1967, the Six-Day War ended and a sense of normalcy began to take hold in Egypt's major cities.

Nasser and Fawzi Discuss New Commanders in Chief and Military Directives

Following the war, Fawzi's evenings and early mornings were spent with President Nasser at his private home, where the two discussed assignments for a new chain of command.

Fawzi recommended Aswan governor and former air force pilot Madkoor Aboul-Eez as Egyptian air force (EAF) commander in chief. He also recommended Egyptian General Abdel-Moneim Riad, an air defense officer, as armed forces chief of staff. Nasser and Fawzi discussed the composition of the general staff from flag officers to the ranks of major. In addition, after learning how verbal orders in Amer's staff caused confusion and created a chaotic environment, Fawzi created a secretariat for himself to issue formal orders to units in the field. Fawzi recounted that

Nasser told him, "This (responsibility of yours) is bitter and hard, and it will need an extra special effort under these circumstances." Fawzi is unique in Egyptian military history as the only flag officer to sit in private with his president to completely and conceptually redesign the armed forces. Fawzi also outlined a series of political-military directives to be taken immediately:

(1) The importance of stabilizing the armed forces and having them focused on a defensive line confronting the Israelis. Nasser and Fawzi discussed Israeli broadcasts of Egyptian losses and how they stoked the flames of a nonexistent conspiracy that the Egyptian people would rise up and topple Nasser. These broadcasts also alleged that the public was demanding a cease-fire with Israel and that Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan was dictating terms to Nasser by telephone. Fawzi asserted that it was vital to prevent Israel from gaining politically from these military successes. It was likely at this juncture that Nasser made the momentous decision to take responsibility for the crushing defeat and offer to step down in a televised broadcast. This would have domestic and regional repercussions, which will be discussed later.

(2) Nasser wanted to bind the Egyptian public to the military and decided to exercise his position as president and leader of the Arab Socialist Union to direct military and civilian affairs. He expressed to Fawzi a desire to restructure the armed forces by entirely removing the condition of a state within a state that plagued many Arab armies. One could argue this goal was never fully realized by Egypt, even to this day.

(3) Nasser began to formulate a foreign policy that refused to negotiate with the Israelis until they returned lands taken in the 1967 war and recognized the rights of Palestinians. Nasser realized that he could not confront Israel militarily, but he also wanted to paint a narrative that Egypt did not seek war for its own sake but to take back its land that was taken by force and aggression. Nasser resolved that the Sinai could only be taken back by force and not through negotiation. This meant Fawzi needed to rebuild the armed forces, and while doing so, hostilities along the canal gradually resumed. Nasser and Fawzi were laying the groundwork for what would be the War of Attrition (1967 to 1970). The Soviet Union's weapons, technical support, and diplomatic leverage was needed for the objective of gradual violence along the canal. Nasser announced an Arab policy whereby Egypt would not be the only frontline state to take on the Israelis, but that Arab League members should participate based on their capabilities. This was a calculated move that would pay off for Nasser because by binding

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all Arab states to Egyptian military policy, he would in effect influence the foreign policies of several Arab states, as well as extract economic contributions for Egypt. Fawzi wrote that Nasser made the Soviets a partner in Egypt's failure by arguing that the prestige of Soviet weapons/technology was on the line. It was a reverse psychology gambit to allow unimpeded access to modern arms, trainers, and Soviet technicians. Nasser ordered Fawzi to prove to the Soviets that Egyptian soldiers could quickly grasp the complexity of advanced Soviet weapons so that the Egyptians could justify to Moscow the requests for additional weapons. Perhaps the most contentious discussion between Fawzi and Nasser occurred when Nasser ordered Egyptian forces to be placed under the command of Soviet military trainers. Fawzi wanted the placement of Egyptian forces under Soviet military trainers to be a concession and for the quantities and nature of Soviet weapons to be different from those imported before 1967. This was to placate the grumbling from those being placed under Soviet training command.

Fawzi and Nasser Continue Their Strategic Formulation

Fawzi and Nasser discussed how to transform their defeat into a war of liberation. The two men discussed conceptually how this would be a defensive war to restore Egyptian soil. They wanted to capitalize on the emotion of the Egyptian people and to craft a national narrative that the Sinai could only be liberated through force of arms and not through negotiation. Nasser indicated to Fawzi that Israel understood only force, and the war should comprehensively deny Israel the means to absorb the Sinai into its new borders. The two discussed that Israel required massive amounts of money through grants and loans in order to absorb its gains. Nasser essentially discussed a diplomatic, legal, and economic campaign to make it difficult for Israel to have the means to develop and exploit the Sinai, the Golan, and the West Bank. The two agreed that the war for national liberation would occur between 1970 and 1971, which gave them a four-year timeline to restore the Egyptian armed forces. Fawzi and Nasser stressed to one another that the Israelis would attempt to interfere with rebuilding the armed forces through a variety of means to include undermining morale through propaganda and economic warfare.

Fawzi's First Directive as Armed Forces Commander in Chief

Upon concluding his meetings with Nasser, Fawzi returned to headquarters and drafted his first directive as armed forces commander entitled, "Directive for the Functioning of the Armed Forces." This was an important document as it began the process of shifting the main mission of the Egyptian armed forces from being guardians of the revolution to liberators of occupied lands. While this single directive would align plans for force structure, weapons, and training, what came after those plans were laid was extraordinary. For the first time, military plans were brought

before a higher council of the armed forces for discussion and refinement; no longer would the whims of one leader constitute final military policy. In addition, Fawzi's first directive changed the armed forces' focus from internal security to external security. It is perhaps a unique case study for the complexities of addressing civil-military affairs — one that has stretched over decades and still hasn't been completely resolved in Egypt.

Arab Leaders Offer Military Aid and Strategize with Nasser

During the Six-Day War, Algerian Foreign Minister Abdel-Aziz Bouteflika (currently Algeria's president) arrived in Cairo on 7 June 1967 in the midst of the war. Fawzi was impressed with Bouteflika arriving as hostilities were under way and conveyed the Algerian leader's offer of troops and MiG fighters. Bouteflika left Cairo and took with him on his personal plane 20 Egyptian fighter pilots who were charged with flying the Algerian MiGs back to Egypt as soon as practicable. A total of 40 Algerian MiG-17Fs would be the first fighters used to defend Egypt after the complete loss of its air force in the 1967 war. On 18 June, Kuwait engineered an Arab Summit to layout the architecture of Arab states condemning Israel with one voice at the U.N. General Assembly. The summit was also to discuss the embargo of petroleum products against the United States, as well as a mass withdrawal of ambassadors. While the oil embargo option was not exercised in the aftermath of the 1967 War, it would be revived in the 1973 Yom-Kippur War.

Jordan's King Hussein arrived on 11 July and engaged in talks with Nasser. The two agreed on a coordinated stance of refusing defeat and affirming the Joint Defense Pact, and developed a unified pan-Arab strategy. Nasser and King Hussein discussed Egypt's increased ties with the Soviet Bloc, due to the United States' biding ties with Israel. They discussed denying Israel a peace deal with Egypt, Jordan, and Syria and thereby causing the Israelis to ignore the Palestinian question. Fawzi recounted that Nasser intended to use the U.N. as a means of gaining time for Egyptian re-armament and tasked Hussein to speak at the U.N. General Assembly with one Arab voice. Jordan was also selected to be the interlocutor between the aggrieved Arab states of Egypt and Syria, and Washington. Fawzi discussed Nasser's meeting with Algeria's leader Houari Boumedienne, Syria's leader Atasi, Iraq's leader Arif, and Sudan's leader Azhari, in Cairo two days later. The leaders coordinated strategy and, more importantly, talking points in briefing Moscow on Egyptian and Syrian needs in restructuring their armed forces.

Soviet Aid to Egypt

In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, Fawzi discussed the details of the massive Soviet airlift and sealift of military hardware to Egypt. On 9 June, the Soviets provided 31 MiG-21



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamal_Abdel_Nasser

Arab leaders assemble in Cairo in 1968. From left to right are President Houari Boumedienne of Algeria, President Nur al-Din al-Atasi of Syria, President Abd al-Rahman Arif of Iraq, President Gamal Abdel-Nasser of Egypt, and President Ismail al-Azhari of Sudan. According to Fawzi, these leaders coordinated strategy in dealing with Israel's territorial gains in the aftermath of the Six-Day War.

fighters and 93 MiG-17 fighter jets via Yugoslavia. Antonov-22 cargo planes arrived hourly to Egyptian airfields, and in June ships disgorged military equipment replacements in both the ports of Alexandria in Egypt and Latakia in Syria. Fawzi wrote that 544 cargo sorties and 15 ships delivered 48,000 tons of equipment to the Egyptian military. The USSR did not request compensation for this installment. Warsaw Pact nations Poland, Yugoslavia, and East Germany provided MiG fighters, artillery, air defense systems, communications equipment, and transport trucks. On 16 June, Soviet General Lashnikov arrived to supervise the offload and distribution of equipment to Egyptian units. Soviet Premier Nikolai Podgorny arrived in Cairo on 21 June with Soviet Marshal Matvei Zakharov, the deputy defense minister and former chief of the Soviet military staff. Fawzi wrote that the Soviet military delegation would be immersed in talks with Nasser, Egyptian Vice President Zakariyah Moheiddine, Ali Sabry, and General Riad as well as Fawzi. The meeting concluded with an agreement between Cairo and Moscow to erase all traces of the Israeli occupation of the Sinai. Egypt would be given priority in newly designed Soviet arms.

Zakharov-Fawzi Discussions on Soviet Military Assistance to Egypt

Marshal Zakharov and Fawzi retreated with their staffs to conduct detailed talks on the nature of the mass flooding of Soviet military hardware, the absorption of these weapons by Egyptian combat formations, and the inculcation of Soviet military doctrine among Egyptian forces. Zakharov and Fawzi's delegations spent four hours discussing weapons systems, with Egyptians asking probing questions in an attempt to comprehend Soviet systems. The discussions extracted a concession from the Soviets to treat Egypt like a Warsaw Pact nation in terms of weapons aid and

sales. The two senior delegations also discussed the Canal Zone and the deployment of forces. Talks then turned to agreements to deploy an initial contingent of 1,200 Soviet military advisors and their treatment, authority, and relationship over Egyptian military personnel. Afterward, Nasser and Fawzi met privately to coordinate talking points on extracting Soviet economic aid. Soviet Premier Podgorny departed for Moscow on 24 June, leaving Zakharov to continue advising the Egyptian general staff.

Fawzi wrote that Zakharov concurred that the immediate need was to ensure Egypt's air defenses, with a focus on varying models of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), radar, and fighter interceptors. Strategically, Fawzi recounted discussions between Nasser and Podgorny. Nasser desired a tangible demonstration of the depth of Soviet support for Egypt. He proposed to the Soviet premier a visit by Soviet warships and the eventual basing of Soviet naval assets in Egypt as a challenge to the U.S. Sixth Fleet, which in Nasser's mind was looked upon as a strategic reserve for Israeli forces. Nasser also used his understanding of the limitations of Soviet jet fighters, as related to Israeli Mirage and Mystere jets, to argue for Egypt's need to acquire the Soviet Union's newest deep strike fighter-bombers.

Zakharov planned and oversaw some of the fiercest battles against German forces as a subordinate of Marshal Konev in World War II. He also assisted in the planning of the invasion of Manchuria, defeating Japanese forces in World War II. By 1967, he led the Soviet delegation that created the initial defensive line along the Suez Canal with Fawzi. There is no mention in Fawzi's memoirs that he was in the presence of one of the Soviet Union's truly talented World War II commanders.

Zakharov requested a meeting on 29 June with Nasser, informing him via Podgorny that the Politburo approved of all of their discussion points. He also informed Nasser that Egypt would get the newly developed Sukhoi long-range bombers. In addition, the Politburo agreed to provide the newly developed and evolving T-72 main battle tank as well as additional MiG-21 jet fighters. The Politburo, through Podgorny, affirmed its commitment to Egypt's defense. Yugoslav leader Marshal Tito visited Egypt and Syria, where he outlined Soviet diplomatic pressure being exerted on U.S. President Lyndon Johnson. The pressure centered on a fair and just resolution of the conflict in the United Nations. The Yugoslav leader reminded Nasser that they were the frontline nation for Moscow's ability to airlift and send cargo by rail for sealift through

Yugoslav ports. When Egypt was at its most vulnerable, Fawzi recounted the efforts by Arab and East Bloc nations that saved the country from immediate catastrophe. Nasser and the Egyptian general staff did not rest until November 1967, when they were assured that the defensive line along the canal was stable. From June to November 1967, Nasser worked 16 to 18 hours a day.

Conclusion

Aside from organizing Soviet military assistance to Egypt, Fawzi and Nasser also had to continue with the restructuring of the Egyptian national security apparatus. Amin Howeidy was appointed as war minister in addition to his duties as director of Egypt's General Intelligence Service (EGIS — Egypt's version of the CIA). He would be the only person in Egypt's modern history to serve as both war minister and EGIS director. On 20 January 1968, Fawzi assumed the war minister portfolio in order to allow Howeidy to focus on intelligence collection, analysis, indication, and warnings. This meant that Fawzi worked as both war minister and commander in chief of the armed forces. These positions remain combined to this day. Combining the two positions was Egypt's way of having civilian cabinet oversight of military affairs. It is unclear if this will change in light of the 2011 revolution in Egypt.

Restructuring Egypt's armed forces, as well as the leadership within it, was an important first step in the country's path toward restoring itself. Fawzi and Nasser's ability to collectively rebuild Egypt's military and gain assistance from the Soviets was an incredible feat. The two men were able to begin the process of removing the humiliating shadow of defeat that had been placed on Egypt during the partial leadership of the mentally unstable Amer. Fawzi and Nasser's accomplishments allowed them to be able to focus on further preparing for the War of Attrition, which would begin in 1967.

CDR Youssef Aboul-Enein is author of *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat and Iraq in Turmoil: Historical Perspectives of Dr. Ali al-Wardi from the Ottomans to King Feisal* (both published by the Naval Institute Press). CDR Aboul-Enein teaches part time at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces and has a passion for highlighting Arabic work of military significance to America's military readers. He wishes to thank Dorothy Corley for her edits and discussion that enhanced this work. Finally, CDR Aboul-Enein wishes to express his appreciation for the National Defense University Library, John T. Hughes Library, and Blackwell Library at Salisbury University.



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