



Egyptian General Abdel-Moneim Riad

The Creation of an Adaptive Military Thinker

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Arab militaries are notoriously known for lack of individual initiative and a rigidity that tends to favor scripted methods of warfare. Some nations like Egypt are trying to get away from Soviet-style doctrine and are slowly attempting to adopt combined arms and western-style tactics. Arab general staffs, on a more philosophical level, must understand that whether adopting eastern bloc or western arms by default buy into their doctrine and military methods of fighting. When posed with this question, senior Egyptian generals point to the 1973 Yom-Kippur War as an example of using Soviet technology with Egyptian improvisation and tactics. It is hard to argue the success of the opening days of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, but what is troubling with this answer is that they are fighting the last war and see the war from the lens of the opening days and not in its entirety. Many Arabic books on the 1973 war focus on the opening successes of Egyptian and Syrian forces but pay scarce attention to lessons learned as Israeli forces tactically achieved the entrapment of the Egyptian Third Army. When confronted, it is easy to blame superpower politics for their loss.

Mohammed Mohammed Al-Gawady, a prolific military author and historian, has conducted quality research and interviewed more than a dozen Egyptian generals, revealing the depth of their tactical and strategic thoughts. He has published several volumes on Egyptian generals who fought, planned, and discussed the 1967 Six-Day War, 1967 Reconstruction of the Egyptian Armed Forces, and 1973 Yom-Kippur War. In the late '90s and early 2000, Al-Gawady wrote the biographies and strategic thoughts of several Egyptian generals like the late Abdel-Ghanny Al-Gamassy (Operations Director, 1973 War), Madkour Abu-al-Eez (Air Marshal after the 1967 War) and many more. Egyptians owe this writer gratitude for preserving the Arab perspective of modern warfare.

In 1984, as a young physician, Al-Gawady wrote a small, 54-page pocket book entitled *Al-Shaheed Abdel-Moneim Riad, Samaa Al-Askariyah Al-Misriyah* (The Martyr [General] Abdel-Moneim Riad, Sky [Model] of the Egyptian Army). The book is published by Dar-Al-Atebaa (Physician's House Press) in Cairo and won Al-Gawady the 1984 National Literature Prize for Biography by Arabic Language Academy Prize for Literature. For members of the U.S. armed forces who train and exercise with the Egyptians, this book offers insight into what Egyptian officers consider as the model modern military commander; his military style is similar to the American way of military leadership. General Riad, who served less than two years as Egypt's chief of staff from 1967-

1969, was a warrior-scholar, admired for his ability to formulate strategic plans and for pointing out problems to his superiors and proposing solutions. His martyrdom is not due to a callous suicidal religious misinterpretation; instead his death came while inspecting the front lines along the Suez Canal, motivating Egyptian artillery and infantrymen when an artillery duel broke out and a shell landed directly in his foxhole. The book focuses on his life from his childhood until his death and specifically the cultivation of an Egyptian military tactician. Officers and Soldiers today can take lessons from his ethic of education, caring for troops and bringing bad news to commanders.

Early Life

Abdel-Moneim Riad was born in 1919 near the village of Tanta along the Nile Delta. His father Mohammed Riad was a military officer — a lieutenant colonel who served as an instructor in Egypt's military academy. In 1928, his father received orders to El-Arish in Gaza. Abdel-Moneim spent his childhood playing in and around the sandy and craggy hills of Gaza, becoming an expert scout along Wadi Arish while playing with Bedouin children and observing military maneuvers conducted by his father. In 1930, the family moved to Alexandria where his father was promoted to colonel and given command of the 2nd Awritah (Battalion). After graduating high school in 1936, Riad wanted a career in the army, but his mother overruled him. He spent a semester at Qasr-el-Ainy Medical School, where he participated in anti-British demonstrations that led to the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The treaty opened Egypt's military schools to the lower classes of society, and over the years Riad would join other cadets like Anwar Sadat and Gamal Abdel Nasser, who would become Egypt's leaders, and Saad-Eddine Al-Shazly, Ismail Ali and a collection of future chiefs of staffs and war ministers.

After seeing a military recruiter once again, he implored his parents who finally relented and on October 6, 1936, he joined the military academy. The academy divided its curriculum into three stages of advancement: preparatory, middle, and senior. Riad was considered a strong personality who quickly grasped his lessons and proceeded to assist other cadets with their studies; he was not known to engage in any activity that did not advance his physical or mental abilities at the military academy. He would graduate with Anwar Sadat in 1938 as a class adjutant and at the top of his class. Colonel Futuh Bey, the academy dean, writes in his record, "He is an exemplary student in all aspects; he gives his best effort and can be relied upon."

While Sadat went on to the signal corps, and many others chose armor, infantry or flight training, Abdel-Moneim Riad went into a unit of the Egyptian armed forces that was established only a year before — anti-air artillery and air defense. He chose this arm of the Egyptian military because he was eager to be part of a newly developed discipline of arms. Second Lieutenant Riad was assigned temporarily under the tutelage of a British captain working in the operations division specializing in anti-air defense in Zamalek (A Cairo district). He used the time to familiarize himself with ballistics, physical principles of trajectory and mathematical calculations to vector ordnance in the air. He studied different types of guns and the command of gun crews. The young lieutenant used his spare time to improve his English at the British Council (an education facility) in Cairo.

World War II

At the outbreak of World War II in 1939, British military leaders in Cairo augmented forces with Egyptian regulars. At this point Riad was a first lieutenant and demonstrated great proficiency in directing Egyptian anti-air gun crews against mock targets. Many Egyptian crews including Riad's would be deployed to defend major Egyptian city centers like Alexandria and Cairo. The author highlights that Nazi planes did raid Alexandria and that Riad spent most of World War II as part of air defense units charged with protecting the crucial port city, home to British Navy ships and supply convoys that were replenishing

the British 8th Army fighting at El-Alamein. Riad's actions under fire and ability to organize defenses as well as command crews got the attention of senior British and Egyptian commanders. He spent part of the war as an anti-air and air defense instructor at the artillery school in Abbasia Barracks in Cairo, training units and traveling with them to Alexandria to command and deploy them. By 1944, he was given permanent orders as an anti-air gunnery and command instructor at the artillery school in Cairo. That same year he was selected to be among the first class of officers to attend the General Staff College in Egypt and graduated in December 1944 with a master's degree in military sciences.

The Young Officer Has Potential

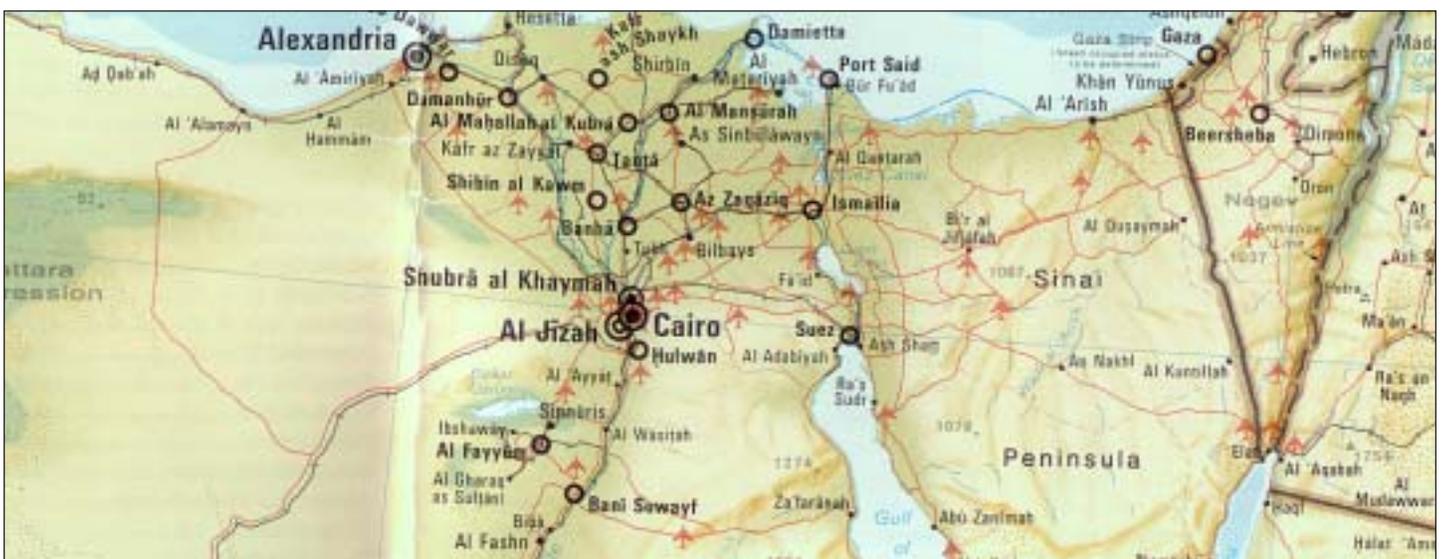
His service in World War II and excellence at military schools including as an instructor was rewarded with a chance to attend the British Artillery School in South Wales learning all elements of artillery operations and its use with other arms. He spent a little under one year in England leaving in February 1946. During the first Arab Israeli-War in 1948, Riad, a major, would be assigned as a staff officer at Cairo Headquarters. The effectiveness of his tour as a staff officer was summarized by General Omar Tantawi who commanded Egyptian artillery units in Palestine; "Despite appalling battle conditions in Palestine, inadequate weapons, poor and nonexistent logistical planning, little information on the enemy (Israeli) forces, I felt that Major Riad was the only thinking

mind in the planning and operations division in Cairo, he rescued me and never let me down throughout operations (in Palestine)." He would be decorated in February 1949 with a Gold Meritorious Medal for his staff work.

Between 1948 and the 1956 Suez War, Riad served as commandant of the anti-air defense school between 1952 and 1953. While at the anti-air school, he focused on education methods and curriculum reform. This included an emphasis on cutting edge training and encouraging students to improvise and innovate with the weapons at hand. He then assumed command of the 1st Anti-Air Brigade in Alexandria. As commander of the brigade, he noted that the pilotless planes which were imported and used to train gun crews cost the Egyptian government 50,000 Egyptian pounds. These planes were radio guided and once hit became useless. Riad, now a lieutenant colonel, brought the problem of cost and one-time use to his brother Dr. Mahmoud Riad, a Ph.D. in electronic engineering who conducted a reverse engineering of the imported plane and worked with his brother to produce a local version for a quarter of the cost. Another innovation Abdel-Moneim Riad conducted during this time was the introduction of radar and electronics to anti-air guns. He argued and saw the potential of radar combined with anti-air guns as a means of increasing accuracy.

The 1956 Suez War

When the combined invasion of Israeli,



British and French forces of Egypt began in 1956 to remove Nasser from power, Riad leapt into his command car and shuttled between Cairo's airfields in an effort to organize defenses and give orders to fire on jets attacking Egypt's Air Force assets on the ground. While missiles slammed into the airports and runways were torn by cluster bombs, Riad would see Egyptian aircrews pushing planes into hardened shelters and attempting to disperse the fighter aircraft. Riad would learn much from the Suez campaign, and it would shape his ideas when he became Chief of Staff 11 years later. While Nasser and War Minister Amer were drunk with political victory, Eisenhower ordered a withdrawal of Anglo-French Israeli forces to forestall a superpower confrontation. Riad understood the Suez War was a military failure and saw airspace in a new light.

The M.V. Frunze Academy

Starting in 1958, Colonel Riad attended a year-long course at the famous Frunze Higher Military Academy, the Soviet Union's premier school for advanced tactics and strategy. He was among the second group of Arab students to attend the academy. There he absorbed lessons directly from Soviet brigade, divisional, and army commanders who fought in World War II. The Soviets were impressed by his knowledge of Russian (Riad would learn Russian, English, French, and German) and his seat was marked by the Frunze instructors for incoming Arab officers to know that here sat the Golden General of the class of 1959. He learned Russian, German, and French by investing in private tutors as early as 1952. A main criticism of the book, it offers no information on Riad's thesis or the battles he took an interest in. Upon his return, he was promoted to flag rank.

Riad then worked at the Egyptian General Staff headquarters as an advisor on air defense. Despite his rank, he attended the latest courses offered by the Egyptian artillery school in missile defense, advanced rocketry, and several other topics to keep current on the latest advances in air defense systems.

General Riad Confronts the Egyptian Military Culture

Riad observed an Egyptian army in disarray with nepotism and military leaders attempting to profit from their office without regard to the military readiness of the forces under their command. The Egyptian Army began to operate as a business — focusing on money making and losing sight of its real mission. He began criticizing what he saw and warned of a massive defeat of Egyptian forces; he also threatened to resign his commission. Recognizing he was the only expert in anti-air defense, Egyptian leaders could not easily accept his resignation, but they could not allow him to criticize the war minister and his cronies. A compromise was reached and he was dispatched to Jordan as part of the Unified Arab Command. This decision saved him from the taint of the 1967 Six-Day War and propelled him to become Armed Forces Chief of Staff, since Nasser was looking for a new breed of Egyptian senior officer to reconstruct his tattered forces.

Riad Gains Unified Command Experience

No record exists of how Riad felt when he was given orders to Jordan, but certainly being selected as Armed Forces Chief of Staff was far from his mind. He probably felt this was an exile for



Egyptian State Information Service, Ministry of Information Web site
Members of the Egyptian Infantry hoist the Egyptian Flag on top of the Israeli Bar Lev Line during the 1973 Yom-Kippur War.

speaking out against military decay and corruption. His new post at the Unified Arab Command allowed him to visit several Arab nations and their leaders and military officers, learning of their plans and attempting to fashion a theory of an Arab-wide air defense network that would guarantee freedom of movement within Arab nations before laying out offensive plans against Israel.

Between March 1965 and July 1966 he attended the Egyptian Higher Military College (known now as the Nasser Higher Military College) where he once again distinguished himself academically before returning to Jordan as a lieutenant general. Riad became convinced in the end of May that Israel would attack Egypt and he requested the Jordanians to relieve him so he could go to Egypt and organize air defenses. His request was refused, but one hour before Israeli jets decimated the Egyptian air force, Jordanian observers reported a mass formation of Israeli Air Force jets headed towards Egypt. General Riad was informed and he sent a signal to Egypt, which through a series of errors and changing of codes never reached the Egyptian General Staff. (The Jordanians were not informed of the new codes.)

1967 War

In late May 1967, General Riad met with King Hussein, who reviewed the troops under his command. The book contains no reference as to the formations Riad commanded or the sector within the Jordanian front he fought in, but it does mention the attachment Jordanian forces felt for Riad, who was a dynamic organizer under fire. On June 11th, Nasser had gone through the process of accepting responsibility for the crushing defeat, and the process of removing War Minister General Amer began and ended with his suicide. While Riad was in Jordan, Nasser named him Egypt's new Armed Forces Chief of Staff and he would serve alongside the new War Minister General Mohammed Fawzy.

Riad spent the first days assessing the Suez Canal front to discover the reasons for the route of the Egyptian Army, which were:

- Egypt lacked an effective Command and Control System;
 - Officers who fled and did not command troops; and
 - There were semi-literate soldiers fighting a 20th century war.
- General Fawzy, General Ismail Ali (commanded the Suez Front

from 1967-1972), and General Riad took a hard look at the Egyptian Armed Forces and began to make reconstruction plans on several levels. This early book by Al-Gawady differs from his 1999-2002 books that explore in depth the discussions between generals, and the Egyptian president.

Some of Riad's actions as chief of staff included:

❑ Restructuring of recruitment and the draft with an emphasis on college and high school educated soldiers capable of making the most of complex weapons systems.

❑ Equipping the Egyptian Armed Forces with the latest technology (every weapons proposal was studied carefully by General Riad who considered Egypt's advantages in infantry and assuring airspace protection.)

❑ The Battle of Ras-Al-Aish occurred in late 1967 and involved an Israeli armored attempt to expand into Port Fouad. Egyptian infantry and Special Forces (Saaqah) were able to repel the advance, with Riad following developments and putting pressure on generals to extend them supplies and armaments. This battle demonstrated to Riad the capability of Egyptian infantry and the need to capitalize on this strength by equipping them with anti-tank weaponry and leveling the Israeli reliance on rapidly moving armor.

❑ Sinking of INS *Eilat*, on October 21, 1967; the Israeli destroyer *Eilat* was met by two Egyptian fast attack missile boats. The Egyptian commanding officer engaged the destroyer with two Soviet Styx-missiles and sunk the destroyer. It was the first time in naval history a warship was sunk by a missile. It was Riad's 48th birthday and he followed events from the Cairo General Staff Headquarters. The operation lasted more than two minutes from the time of engagement to the sinking of the *Eilat*.

❑ In December 1968, Israeli reconnaissance jets flew over the Gulf of Suez. Riad decided to test the SAM-missile technology provided by the Soviets. According to the book, three Israeli planes were downed, and this experiment led to the massive SAM wall used to negate Israel's air advantage in the opening days of the 1973 war.

❑ Riad also authorized insertion missions in the Sinai to reconnoiter Israeli positions and conduct sabotage. This was in addition to undertaking mass artillery harassment making the Israeli side of the Suez as uncomfortable as possible. The Egyptians were experimenting with methods that were employed in mass in the 1973 war.

Strategic Thoughts on Air Defense

In Baghdad, Riad attended the conference of Arab Armed Forces Chief of Staffs and by then he had argued that investments in infantry, tanks, and an air force is useless if Arab forces could not guarantee freedom of movement within Arab borders. He urged for an integrated Arab air defense system that tied Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon into several strategic command and control centers. He also envisioned the dispersal of Arab jet fighters throughout several Arab states with a central command and control which could concentrate jet fighters and bombers to where they are needed or to conduct a concentrated offensive against Israeli targets. This would make the mission of Israel knocking out Arab air forces much more difficult with this new Arab integrated air

defense system and combined jet fighter/bomber vectoring method.

Upon his return from Baghdad, Riad went to inspect the front lines of the Suez front and motivate Egyptian troops by sharing with them his recent trip to Iraq. An artillery duel broke out and he took cover in a foxhole that sustained artillery hits; he died in the field.

Strategic Legacy of General Riad

General Riad's ideas of breaking down Arab goals into two phases was unveiled by Nasser in an Arab League Summit. The first phase was securing military freedom of action within Arab states, particularly its air defense. The second and final objective was to collectively liberate Palestine and lands taken by the Israelis in 1967.

In 1953, Colonel Riad challenged a Swiss firm building an anti-air system for Egypt, arguing that technology and jet fighters have changed the way anti-air guns can be employed and especially the rate of fire of anti-air projectiles. He brought together Swiss and Egyptian engineers who modified the system to Egyptian specifications. This is a lesson to military leaders of the need to push contractors to provide capable weapons systems. The book claims that Riad's modifications were employed in NATO countries as well.

Riad also wanted reform in education; it was not enough for an instructor to be a subject matter expert. He invested in a two month course for military instructors to attend at Egypt's Education Ministry. He wanted people who had the skills to impart knowledge to students. Riad was the first general to concern himself with the way Egyptian officers and soldiers learned from western and soviet manuals. He insisted that students not only study the Arabic translations but also make an effort to read the tactical works and operational manuals in the original language it was published.

General Riad also paid attention to the individual soldier. During a lecture to military doctors, he said a doctor's place was beside the fighting infantryman, ensuring he was in top physical condition and treating his battle wounds. Despite the presence of military technology, a military cook (field morale) can make the difference as to defeat or victory. Riad also believed that military commanders are made not born through education, opportunity, trust and experience. He urged Egyptian generals to give their juniors chances to excel and learn from their mistakes. He also believed in soliciting advice from second and third echelons before making a military decision or drafting war plans.

General Riad also firmly believed in the separation of military and civil affairs. He criticized the practice of appointing generals to diplomatic posts and governorships of cities and provinces. He felt this was inappropriate military interference with politics and detracted from the main mission of military readiness. General Riad also had some unconventional ideas; he believed that marriage and a professional military career was incompatible and never married.

Lieutenant Commander Youssef Aboul-Enein is currently serving as the country director for North Africa and Egyptian Affairs at the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He is a frequent contributor of essays and reviews on Middle East issues for Department of Defense publications. Translations of Arabic materials cited represent Aboul-Enein's understanding of the material and any errors are unintended. Special thanks goes to the Chicago Public Library for making the Arabic work available to the author.
