
Youssef H. Aboul-Enein

Richard J. Norton

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Today’s headlines are filled with discussions questioning the ethics of launching unmanned weapons (drones) against targets when nearby innocent civilians might be killed or injured by an attack. It is interesting to reflect on the ethical ramifications of launching thousands of unmanned weapons (the *fu-go* balloons) against an entire continent, with no ability to predict within thousands of miles where the weapons would strike or who would be injured or killed. Such attacks today would certainly violate the law of armed conflict, but they must be judged within the context of warfare in the last century.

I strongly recommend this book to those with an interest in the technology of warfare, and to those who may have heard of the balloon bomb attacks and thought them to be almost-mythical events.

JOHN E. JACKSON


Few states in modern times have seen their military beaten as badly as Egypt did in 1967—and have that military survive. Even fewer, perhaps no others, have then deliberately rebuilt that defeated force to a point at which a mere five years later it could again offer battle and, arguably, produce victory. How the Egyptians accomplished this has been something of an incomplete and little-known story up to now. This is mainly due to a lack of translated articles and writings penned by senior Egyptian leaders. Youssef H. Aboul-Enein has, with this volume, begun to fill in some of the major gaps in the account.

Aboul-Enein’s book is actually a collection of articles initially published in *Infantry* magazine. Each of the original accounts was written by General Mohamed Fawzi, the man handpicked by Nasser to build the defeated and demoralized Egyptian forces into a professional, combined-arms military that could retake and hold occupied Egyptian territory. Fawzi served as war minister for both Nasser and Sadat and was the master architect of the stunningly successful creation of professionalism in the Egyptian armed forces. His voice, despite whatever biases and personal axes to grind he may bring to the table, deserves to be heard, and Aboul-Enein’s translation gives Fawzi that opportunity.

Fawzi’s challenge was massive. The pre-Fawzi army was much more involved with state security than with power projection or war fighting. As the 1967 war had revealed, the Egyptian armed forces, even with Soviet equipment, were woefully inferior technologically to Israeli forces. The Egyptian army was riddled with low morale and displayed an apparently well-deserved inferiority complex. Its soldiery was, for the most part, uneducated and poorly trained. The Egyptian high command was overcentralized, overpoliticized, and, as events had proved, unable to exercise anything like the command and control required in modern combat. The end of the war both left Israel with strategic depth and turned the Suez Canal into a natural defensive barrier that was further fortified with a series of formidable defensive positions.

Fawzi admits to having certain unusual advantages in accomplishing his
mission. Nasser was willing to give his new war minister as close to a blank check as could be imagined. Nothing was more important than securing a victory and expunging the shame of 1967. Furthermore, the Soviet Union became a guaranteed supplier of military hardware, not only making up the quantitative Egyptian losses but substantially improving equipment quality as well. Fawzi makes the point that the Soviets were less motivated by a common ideology in this effort than by the need to prove that their equipment was at least on a par with that of the United States, and to maintain their geopolitical position in the region. Fawzi also confirms that the Soviet presence on the ground was extensive, that Soviet forces not only advised but performed certain military duties as well.

Fawzi brought new capabilities to Egypt and improved others. Surface-launched ship-to-ship missiles, modern surface-to-air missile batteries, new armor and aircraft all entered the Egyptian inventory. Fawzi understood, however, that new hardware would not be enough. Military-school attendance was increased, and the military’s intellectual capabilities expanded. But beyond that, he explains, the three-year “war of attrition” that Egypt waged against Israel (1967–70) was a deliberate effort to blood the Egyptian army, test new tactics, and deploy new forces. Over this period, Fawzi argues, the Israeli forces came to embrace a defensive mind-set, while the Egyptian army became imbued with the spirit of the offensive. Although most books claim Israel won the war of attrition, Fawzi claims this was not the case. According to Fawzi, not only did Israeli jets increasingly avoid Egyptian airspace, but Egyptian soldiers underwent quantum improvements as well—and these improvements were the real war aims of this period. It is also clear that whatever strategic deterrent the Israeli leaders thought they might have against the Egyptians did not work when it came to preventing at least a limited war. As the Egyptian army began to believe in itself, Fawzi and his officers crafted plans for what would become one of the most successful set-piece battles of the twentieth century: the 1973 crossing of the Suez Canal and the breaching of the Bar-Lev line.

Reproducing the Infantry articles, complete with their original and somewhat repetitive forewords, gives the book something of a choppy feel. It is also clear that this work is a synopsis of Fawzi’s memoirs, not a complete translation. Some readers will be left with a desire to know more. Not surprisingly, the focus of the book tends to be at the strategic level. Readers who want more tactical details will have to find them elsewhere. Unfortunately for our understanding of Egyptian perspectives of how the war was waged, Fawzi was relieved of his duties two years before the war began and was arrested for conspiring to overthrow Sadat, so this critical element is sadly lacking. However, these shortcomings pale when compared with the value inherent in this work.

RICHARD J. NORTON


Although the term “toxic leadership” has recently come into vogue, the U.S. military is no stranger to the phenomenon.