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A Clash of Cultures: The Expulsion of Soviet Military Advisors from Egypt

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The US Government is as heavily involved with the Egyptian armed forces as any other military in the world, including the Israelis. In 1981 the United States agreed to support Egypt's Five-Year Plan to rebuild its armed forces, and we are providing billions of dollars in equipment that includes tanks, antitank weapons, air defense systems, and some of the latest fighters in our inventory. We now have hundreds of US military personnel living and working in Egypt with our military assistance teams; US military units have conducted joint desert exercises with the Egyptian armed forces.

This heavy involvement may have some serious future implications if we examine the Egyptians' previous relationship with the Soviets. For example, who can say what Egypt's intentions will be in 1986 after its army is rebuilt into a regional superpower? Twelve years ago President Sadat stunned the world by expelling the Soviets' massive military presence from Egypt.

In hindsight, the Egyptian-Soviet break appears to have been caused by the complex influences of political, economic, military and cultural forces, with the intercultural problems eventually becoming the straw that broke the camel's back. The relationship of the Egyptian military and its Soviet advisors represents—on the Russians' part—a classic example of how to exacerbate cultural differences. Soviet indifference and rudeness eventually became a major factor in the ultimate Egyptian decision to expel them. In looking back over the entire seventeen year history of the Russian stay in Egypt, it is evident that the Soviets could hardly have done worse, even if they had deliberately set out to antagonize their Egyptian clients. This article will briefly outline the historical background of the Soviets in Egypt, discuss the termination of their military advisory role, and then examine in some detail the perceptions and cultural problems which caused the expulsion.¹

Background: 1955-1972. The Soviets first became influential in Egypt in 1955, barely three years after the Free Officer's Movement overthrew King

Farouk. Soon after the coup d'état, Nasser made a strong plea to the United States for the arms required to put the Egyptian Army on an equal footing with the Israelis. When no progress could be made, Egyptian public opinion as well as pressure from his officer corps persuaded Nasser to turn toward the Soviet Union. It was during this time that Egypt and the Soviets began to evaluate each other and both saw the potential value of a military relationship. At first, the Russians moved very cautiously. It was the year of the Four Power summit in Switzerland and they did not want to prejudice the "spirit of Geneva." They suggested to the Egyptians that the arms transaction be nominally concluded through Czechoslovakia.² This was acceptable to the Egyptians and on 27 December 1955, Nasser announced the conclusion of a trade agreement in which Czechoslovakia made a commitment to supply arms "according to the needs of the Egyptian Army on a purely commercial basis."³ The Soviets had their foot in the Middle East's door, and they would get a lot of sand on that boot over the next seventeen years. Moscow quickly showed that it would establish strong ties with Egypt and expanded its role to the equipping and training of the Egyptian Army.

The 1956 Suez war provided the Soviet Union with an even greater opportunity to demonstrate its good will and patronage to Egypt. The Israelis invaded Sinai 29-30 October 1956, and the British and French followed the next day. The Russians were slow to react to this crisis because at that same time, the Soviet Army was tied down with combat operations in Hungary and it took nearly a week to respond to the Middle East. Soviet Chairman Nicolai Bulganin sent threatening notes to the French, British, and Israeli governments, which along with US pressure, brought about a cease-fire on 7 November. Then the Soviets became even more strident in their diplomatic action and through Tass loudly proclaimed their support for Egypt. "Soviet citizens among whom there are great numbers of pilots, tankmen, artillery men and officers who took part in the Great Fatherland War (World War II) and are now in reserve, asking to be allowed to go to Egypt as volunteers so as to fight together with the Egyptian people for the expulsion of aggressors from Egyptian land."⁴ This support, along with another arms deal concluded immediately after the fighting had a favorable impact on Egyptian public opinion.⁵

However, after the systematic and total destruction of the Egyptian Army by the Israelis during the June 1967 Six Day War, the situation began to change. The Egyptians became disillusioned under the pall of defeat. With some justification they felt that the Russians had let them down in this terrible crisis. Anti-Soviet sentiment began to surface and Nasser himself contributed to this Arab hostility. In his resignation speech of 9 June 1967, he described how Egypt's defeat was in part caused by its heeding Moscow's urgent request not to start a war.⁶ In the period of postwar depression and humiliation, Egyptian soldiers and airmen began to talk against their Soviet

advisors. Mohammed Heikal states that some of the resentment against the Russians found its way into the press in 1967. He tells the following story: "One of the experts, [Russian] who had been attached to the air force, wrote a report in which he claimed that its officers, especially those in the Cairo West Base, were lazy and incompetent. The Russian claimed that after the first Israeli strike, he had noticed that there were three Sukhoi [aircraft] still intact on the runway, so he told some of the pilots to fly them to safety. They said they had no orders, and after a quarter of an hour the Israelis came back and destroyed these planes too. This report reached General Fawzi, the new Minister of War, and helped to exacerbate feelings."⁷

From 1967 onward, the relationship of the Soviet advisors and the Egyptian military seemed to be troubled by friction, strained feelings and mistrust. The sudden death of President Nasser did not ease the situation. On 28 September 1970, less than 24 hours after he had mediated an end to fighting in Jordan between that Army and the Palestinians, Gamal Abdal-Nasser died of a heart attack. He had ruled Egypt for nearly twenty years and left his country in an almost *de facto* military alliance with the Soviet Union.⁸ By 1970, the Soviet Union had, in response to Egyptian requests for assistance, occupied military bases in Egypt and Soviet military personnel were operating aircraft and surface-to-air missile sites. Although they had increased their military aid in certain types of defensive weaponry, the Soviets were not confident about their ability to contain any future contest between the Arabs and the Israelis. Given this situation, the Soviets encouraged a status quo in Arab-Israeli relations, but this situation became very distasteful with the Egyptian leadership. During 1971, the Russian presence became increasingly unpopular.⁹ Exasperating the problem was the heavy-handedness of many Russian representatives; friction with the military advisors; the virtual takeover of bases by the Soviets; and a no war no peace situation. Egyptian patience finally wore thin and President Sadat unexpectedly announced the expulsion of Soviet advisors on 19 July 1972.

The Great Divorce: 19 July 1972. The cool deliberate speech in which President Anwar El-Sadat unilaterally terminated the mission of the Soviet advisors was as decisive a shift in Soviet-Egyptian relations as the initial Czech arms deal of 1955. Sadat announced to a jubilant Egyptian people that: "all decisions taken must emanate from our own free will and the Egyptian personality, and in service to the people of Egypt who never accepted to enter into spheres of influence." He added ". . . political decisions must be made in Egypt by its political leadership without having to seek permission from any quarter, whatsoever its status." He noted the clash of Soviet-Egyptian attitudes by saying "there were differences at times in our points of view, but I was always under the impression that these were normal differences."¹⁰

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It is interesting to note that, even though there had been a marked increase in friction between the Russian advisors and the Egyptian military, the decision to oust the Soviets caught Washington completely by surprise. US press reports carried stories of key US officials being "stunned" by the move and that urgent high level meetings were held to assess the move's impact.¹¹ Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stated that "the decision came as a complete surprise to Washington."¹² But two days after the expulsion speech, Kissinger prepared a reflective analysis in which he set forth his perspective of the ouster as being a result of both US-USSR rapprochement and Egyptian disillusionment. "It has been apparent in the last two months that the Egyptians have resigned themselves to the fact that there will be little diplomatic movement on the Arab-Israeli problem this year because of the US elections Despite this apparently rational calculation, Sadat has faced the dilemma of how to avoid allowing inaction to produce a permanent freeze of the situation . . . frustration over lack of movement on the Arab-Israeli issue has been high in Cairo. The US-USSR summit confirmed the sense that nothing was going to happen this year and brought to a head criticism of the Soviet role that had been going on in Cairo even before the summit."¹³

The shock of the Egyptian announcement had hardly subsided when most of the approximately 20,000 Soviet advisors were headed back to Russia. This rapid, almost total, Soviet withdrawal was generally attributed to Russian anger over the insulting way in which they were asked to leave. However, a probable underlying cause was Soviet frustration over the Egyptian military's inability to master the equipment they had given them, and that they would never be able to train the Egyptians into an efficient fighting force.¹⁴ Perhaps more descriptive of the Soviet mood toward the Egyptians was the comment attributed to a high Soviet source that "they realized that, if there were to be another round, their Egyptian clients would make such a poor showing that Russia would be made to look ludicrous."¹⁵

With today's hindsight, it is fairly evident that in addition to cultural problems, the troubles caused by political, economic and military relations also contributed to the break. On the diplomatic side, there is little doubt that the US-USSR summit contributed to the Egyptian perception that both the United States and the Soviet Union had vested interests in maintaining peace (i.e., the *status quo*) in the Middle East. However, the Egyptians became indignant because they saw themselves as the victims of the Soviet desire to maintain a "no peace no war" policy.

Economically, dissatisfaction existed because Egypt was heavily dependent on the sale of cotton to Western markets to earn foreign exchange. Unfortunately, Egypt had to mortgage much of its crop to the Russians to pay for Soviet arms shipments. If this were not enough, added friction resulted from bilateral trade agreements that allowed the Soviets to compete with the

Egyptians in the European cotton markets.¹⁶ This situation usually meant that the Egyptians received depressed prices for their cotton. Such an unfavorable arrangement kept the Egyptians in a continuing debtor relationship with the Russians and severely limited Cairo's ability to obtain either the goods or cash with which to operate their economy.

From the military aspect, there was considerable dissatisfaction, especially at the upper levels, because the Soviets were initially reluctant to provide adequate numbers of offensive weapons to replace the 1967 losses. Nasser's last months as well as Sadat's initial period in office were spent in time-consuming negotiations for Soviet arms. As these negotiations dragged in Egyptian efforts to gain a viable offensive capability, the talks became more like bazaar haggling than discussions between allies.¹⁷

Culturally, the Soviets were generally obtuse in dealing with the Egyptians. Russian attitudes infringed upon Egyptian sovereignty and cut deeply into Egyptian sensitivity. President Sadat recalls that "the Soviet Union began to feel that it enjoyed a privileged position in Egypt—so much so that the Soviet Ambassador had assumed a position comparable to the British High Commissioner in the days of the British occupation of Egypt."¹⁸ This attitude did little to help Russian popularity in Egypt and strangely, the Soviets did little to change their image. When not on duty the Russian advisors kept mainly to themselves, and even their children had their own playgrounds. Egyptian sources took note that they had even purchased a lot of expensive property in the center of Cairo for their self-isolation.¹⁹ Individually, the Soviets had a reputation for aloofness. This isolation and their personal behavior did not endear them to the normally gregarious Egyptians. For example, when a stranger, an Egyptian, tried out his three words of Russian on them in the street, the Russians usually would look the other way.²⁰ It should be no surprise that of the various factors affecting the Soviet expulsion—political, cultural, economic and military—the cultural factor probably became the most overbearing to the average Egyptian. On 19 July, after Sadat's expulsion speech, there was a tumultuous outpouring of emotion by the entire Egyptian people. They had perceived a loss of their national self-respect to the Soviet Union, and Sadat's popular act had regained it. With all its efforts, the Kremlin had failed to translate its essentially pro-Arab policy into an effective political relationship with the Egyptian people. This failure can be laid to a severe strain in interpersonal relations caused by cultural differences.

The Egyptian Perception of the Soviets. As a Third World client of the Russians, the Egyptians found the Soviets difficult to deal with at the personal level. For example, after the Six Day War, Egyptian officers generally did not get along well with their Soviet advisors. Various sources claim that one of the Soviet military's main problems was the downward shift in quality and

professionalism of the advisors sent to Egypt after 1967. In this regard, Mohammed Heikal states, “. . . in the aftermath of the 1967 war . . . the current quality of the experts (Soviet) was uneven, and many commanders, junior as well as senior, found their continual presence irksome.”²¹ Along with this was the mental rigidity of the Soviet military with instances where Soviet behavior was considered totally arrogant and disparaging to the Egyptians.

Another area which contributed to a poor image was the experiences of the Egyptian military students who went to the Soviet Union. It appears that few Arabs visited Russian homes and that there was generally a lack of mixing.²² Here Heikal quotes a particularly revealing figure. He claims that of the approximately 200,000 Arab military students who have been to the Soviet Union, fewer than 100 have married Russians. Conversely, he claims that half of the 15,000 Arab students who went to the United States in the late fifties and sixties married American girls.²³

Perception of the Soviets was not helped by their ineptness at cultural exchanges. For instance the Soviet Ministry of Cultural Affairs rented one of Cairo's finest cinemas, the Odeon, to show Russian films. This should have been a successful program because Egyptians love to attend movies. However, the Odeon films were attended by only two to three people per showing. The Egyptian press attributed the poor reception to the films dramatization of socialist values which Egyptians found boring.²⁴ This disparaging perception of the Soviets continued through the late 1960s and into the 1970s. It is not difficult to understand that these cultural misunderstandings could easily spill over into the military relationship.

Military Problems Arising from Cultural Differences. As the Russian presence in Egypt matured, cultural differences, attitudes and strained personal relationships took their toll on the Soviet military assistance program. Deteriorating interpersonal relationships played a large part in President Sadat's decision to expel the Soviets as he himself noted: “One of the reasons was the Soviet attitude to me”²⁵ There can be no doubt that the attitudes and actions of the Soviet advisors caused much friction. In addition to the considerable differences in language and customs, the Russians insulted Egyptian self-respect with their absolute takeover of bases; their condescending attitude toward Egyptian military prowess and the measured amount and poor quality of military equipment allotted to the Egyptian army.

Officially there were no Soviet bases, only “facilities,” such as the airfields at Mansura, Jiyanklis, Inchas, Cairo West, Bani Suef, Aswan and others such as Wadi Natrun. They also had naval bases at Mersa Matruh, Alexandria and Port Said.²⁶ However, as time past, it became apparent that these “Soviet facilities” were a cause of concern among the Egyptians inasmuch as the Russians were behaving like “usurpers.” Relationships were strained by

actions in the Nile desert where certain roads leading to Russian installations were closed to traffic, with local inhabitants permitted use only by a Russian pass.²⁷ Even the usually sympathetic Lebanese-based Communist daily newspaper, *Al Nida*, reported that the Egyptian Command objected to the strict control which the Soviet advisors exercised over the military bases where they were in charge.²⁸ Israeli sources were aware that the Soviets had restricted access to such areas as Wadi Natrun air base where MIG-23 aircraft were stationed.²⁹ Recent interviews with Egyptian officers confirmed the denial of entry to Soviet bases to Egyptian officers and emphasized the general indignation at these Soviet prerogatives.

The scope of Soviet basing was the source of many stories that circulated among the Egyptians. There was even a report that Sadat himself no longer had access to Soviet bases on Egyptian soil. In March of 1972 President Sadat invited Libya's President Quadhafi, who was attending an Arab League Conference in Cairo, to accompany him on a visit to the Soviet naval facility at Mersa Matruh. The two Arab heads of state left Cairo in their official motorcade preceded by the usual security force and motorcycles. Upon arrival, Sadat allegedly became furious when the Soviet Commandant of the facility firmly refused to allow his party to enter. Finally, after telephoning the Soviet Ambassador, Valdimir Vinogradov, in Cairo, it was decided that only President Sadat was to be admitted.³⁰ The story, probably only partially accurate, is an example of the type of anti-Soviet rumors which commonly spread throughout the country for ready local consumption and embellishment.

Friction with Soviet Military Advisors. "Everyone wanted change because every officer suffered from the advisors" was a comment from a typical high-ranking Egyptian officer.³¹ Shortly after the expulsion, the Arab press picked up on the stories concerning strained relationships between Egyptian officers and Soviet advisors, detailing these problems as "important factors in the recall of the Russians," and noting that "daily friction created an unhealthy atmosphere and irritabilities."³²

The Egyptian military felt that the mere presence of the Soviet military in their country reflected on their self-respect as well as the ability of the Egyptian military to command. But the Soviet mission was much more than a mere mission. The Soviet advisors numbered about 20,000 with approximately 5,000 officers saturating all of the Egyptian military organizations down to battalion and even lower in the case of tank and artillery units. In the Navy there were advisors placed at the top, starting with the Chief of the Navy, down to an advisor on each ship or patrol boat.³³ This saturation of advisory assistance caused a great deal of resentment because the Russian advisors had a direct access to high authorities, and few things escaped their watchful eyes.

The Soviet military style at times added to the Egyptian resentment. In one case a very senior Soviet officer flew to an Egyptian camp and addressed the officers. The Russian arrived on schedule and proceeded to lecture the assembled officers in detail on the virtues of promptness. Apparently unbeknownst to the Russian, his lecture was received as an insult and the Egyptian officers were infuriated that an advisor, a guest, in their country would have the nerve to make such a condescending talk. It is likely that the Soviet officer had little appreciation of the ill will his lecture had caused.³⁴

Some sources have reported that many Soviet advisors were frustrated by the difficulty the Egyptians had in grasping highly technical warfare.³⁵ This Soviet frustration led to an arrogance which infuriated the Egyptians. The Soviet disdain for Egyptian military and technical ability led to a continuing air of mistrust. According to an Egyptian military source, the Soviet advisors continually pointed out Egyptian weaknesses and the Egyptians were perpetually being cast as militarily incompetent. In Cairo one senior Soviet military advisor reportedly told his Western colleague: "You have an expression in the West: 'give us the tools and we'll do the job,' here in Egypt they have changed it slightly. Now it's, 'give us the job and we'll wreck the tools.'"³⁶

Another story that made the rounds in 1972 was that the Egyptians realized their Soviet advisors were not giving honest evaluations and assistance in their work such as pointing out errors in the Egyptian situation estimates and war plans. The Egyptian staff came to the conclusion that the Russians had been patronizingly approving any and all Egyptian assessments, no matter how faulty. To confirm their suspicions, a draft sector defense plan was prepared which deliberately left out some basic considerations. The Russians examined the work and then returned the plan with fine grades, thus proving the Egyptian suspicions.³⁷

Another area which caused the Egyptian-advisor friction was the Egyptian fear that the Soviets were plundering Egypt's limited supply of gold. It was commonly believed that the Russians were taking advantage of their many military flights between Cairo and the Soviet Union to smuggle out a considerable amount of gold. One story relates how Minister of Defense Sadeq himself supervised the arrest of some Soviet officers at Cairo Airport attempting to smuggle 30 kilograms of gold to Russia. This incident caused a major row with official protests on both sides.³⁸

Soviet Military Aid. Following the Six Day War, the Soviet Union's policy was to build up the Egyptian armed forces to a point where they could protect themselves from an Israeli attack. It was not the intentions of the Soviets to provide sufficient weaponry in which the Egyptians could regain its lost territory. For example, the air force initially was rebuilt through the addition of obsolete MIG 15 and 17 fighter bombers from Soviet surplus

stocks. Surface-to-air missiles were not significantly increased and the Russians only symbolically satisfied longstanding Egyptian requests for surface-to-surface missiles and, then, not until well into the War of Attrition. Vital artillery stocks were rebuilt to only about one-third of their prewar levels, and antitank weapons were not significantly modernized.³⁹ This limiting of the supply pipeline upset Egyptian officers as they perceived that their offensive needs were not being met and this led to a general letdown in morale. The Egyptians soon realized that the Soviets were not ready to fulfill their needs for offensive weapons and this resulted in further haggling over Egyptian attempts to increase arms shipments. Such conflict on the amount and type of Soviet aid contributed to the Egyptian conclusion that "the Soviet Union was getting more out of Egypt than it was putting in."⁴⁰ A feeling of being manipulated by one of the superpowers caused a sober assessment by the Egyptians. In discussions with Tito, Nasser expressed the Egyptian frustration when he said, "please tell the Soviet Union that I would be more willing to accept defeat—anything, in fact—than to be treated like this."⁴¹

The one-sided artillery and air duels over the canal in the War of Attrition, however, convinced the Russians to increase their arms shipments to prevent Israeli domination of the confrontation. Not only did the Soviets dramatically improve the Egyptian air defense, but a cross canal attack capability was provided. However, this move was too little and too late to salvage the Russian image. Egyptian resentment, frustration and the feeling of being used by the Russians in the game of politics with the United States had done irreparable damage.

Restriction in arms shipments was not the only area of concern in dealing with Soviet equipment. The Egyptian military's restiveness was compounded by the belief that it was given obsolete equipment, was provided a minimum of spare parts and ammunition, and was given inadequate instruction on extremely complicated maintenance and operations procedures.⁴² It should be noted that complaints about Soviet equipment were not limited to the military. The quality of Soviet bloc products was particularly troublesome to Egyptian technocrats and businessmen, who were well aware of Western standards of quality and who were alarmed at equipment breakdowns and shoddy material. A *Christian Science Monitor* article on this problem noted that: "Egyptian officials and merchants specifically complained about Soviet trucks, Hungarian locomotives, East German automobiles, the higher sulfur content of Soviet crude oil, and the presence of foreign matter in some shipments of wheat sold to Egypt."⁴³

The low esteem Egyptians had for Soviet equipment was compounded by the seeming technical superiority of the US equipped Israelis. In fact, after the 1967 war, the Israelis made use of thousands of captured Egyptian vehicles of Soviet manufacture. These vehicles were often the butt of Israeli jokes,

especially the jeeps, which they called "Russian cadillacs," as they sat steaming over alongside Israeli roads.⁴⁴

One well known Egyptian story which illustrates the Egyptian distrust of Soviet equipment relates to the deep strikes of the Israeli air force into Egypt during 1970. The Egyptian air force attempted to challenge and blunt the strikes, but they were unsuccessful, losing one or two aircraft in each attempt. The Russian advisors claimed that the losses were due to the poor quality of the Egyptian pilots, and in denial, the Egyptian pilots publicly claimed that their MIGs were no match for the Israeli phantoms because the MIG was an inferior fighter aircraft. According to various sources the complaining officers were punished, and Soviet pilots were detailed to fly the next interceptor missions to quell the uproar about inferior planes. On 30 July 1970, the first time the Soviets took to the air in 12 MIG-21s, the Israelis reportedly shot down four planes in a matter of minutes. Some say that there was almost as much celebrating over this event in Cairo as there was in Tel Aviv, as officers' messes jubilantly offered toast after toast to the "gallant professionalism of the Soviet fighting man." "You'd think they had won a battle," a Russian air force advisor was quoted as grumbling bitterly.⁴⁵

Soviet Rudeness and Lack of Courtesy. This catalog of problems between the Egyptians and their Soviet advisors such as the indignation over control of bases, the friction between the advisor and advisee, and the slow delivery of Russian military equipment were seriously exacerbated by the poor personal relationship with the Soviets. On the surface the Egyptian people seemed to tolerate the Russians, or at least the government's public opinion polls indicated such, but Egyptian frustration was further aggravated in 1970.⁴⁶ The military friction which had existed since the 1967 defeat was slowly making itself known to the man in the street. Encouraged by the turbulent transition atmosphere following the death of Nasser, more and more stories of gauche Soviet military behavior began to surface.

General Mohammed Sadeq, the Egyptian Commander in Chief and War Minister, was known to be highly critical of Soviet personnel behavior in private talks to Egyptian officers. What made his attitude even more critical to this issue was his enormous popularity with the young Egyptian officers. For some time he had been recognized as a leading force in pressuring the government to expel the Russians. For the Soviets the animosity was mutual as they worked hard to have him relieved of command. It was an unhealthy situation with little prospect for mutual trust and cooperation as the disagreements continued. In order to cope with advisor problems in a professional manner, Sadeq had established a so-called "Court of Honor" system to deal with problems between the Egyptian military and their advisors. Rising tensions early in 1972 caused these court of honor incidents to increase from a relative handful to an average of 80 cases a month. This is a

clear indication that the advisory role was causing much unrest and bad feeling in the army.⁴⁷ There were also some reported military incidents such as scattered unit mutinies on the Canal and arrests of some air force officers at Beni Suef air base. These were tense times as there was also an alleged incident of an officer making an anti-Soviet speech to the assembled faithful at Cairo's al Huseini Mosque urging the military to take charge of its own destiny and start a Jihad.⁴⁸

As time went on the difficulties between Sadeq and the Russians were compounded by Egyptian internal politics and eventually, despite his popularity, Sadeq was replaced by the Naval Commander, Ahmad Ismail Ali. This change, however, did not quiet the military pressure for a change in the Soviet relationship. After Sadeq's departure, the Egyptian Army Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Saad al Din Shadhili, continued to receive reports of Soviet rudeness. At one banquet a Soviet general was feeling the effect of heavy drinking and, during after dinner remarks, called Egypt an "unfaithful paramour." General Shadhili demanded and obtained the recall of this officer.⁴⁹ It is obvious that such tactless behavior and comments could understandably cause much difficulty in personal relationships.

There were numerous other occasions in which the Soviets put their foot in their mouths and made what was perceived as insults against Egypt. For instance, in addressing General Shadhili and other senior Egyptian officers, the senior Soviet military advisor made what was considered to be an openly contemptuous remark. He reportedly said, "you are like a man with two wives and do not know which one to choose."⁵⁰ This was immediately received as a negative reflection on Egyptian manhood and the advisor was also sent packing after intense pressure from Shadhili.

Considering the number of such insensitive remarks, it appears that the Russians were unable to understand the cultural importance of self-respect and honor to the Arabs. One reason for their inflexibility may lie in Russian culture and that peculiar mindset which President Saddam Hussein of Iraq once called the "Siberian mentality."⁵¹ At times even Radio Moscow did its best to undermine efforts to cooperate with the Egyptians. After the Six Day War, a Soviet broadcast in Arabic, no less entitled "Reasons for the Arab Defeat," attributed the collapse of the Egyptian Army to a backward social structure.⁵² Various military writers also climbed on the bandwagon and wrote scathing attacks on the Egyptian Army's professional shortcomings with statements like, "their officer businessmen who were more concerned with business than combat training of soldiers and NCO's."⁵³

The Soviet Lesson. The Russian failure in Egypt brought to an end their largest and most far reaching foreign military involvement since World War II and prior to Afghanistan. There can be no doubt that many of the problems were caused by cultural conflicts and failures by the Russians to understand

the Arab psychology. In retrospect, it seems as if the Russians deliberately tried to cultivate a poor image in Egypt with their haughty treatment of the military and their measured distribution of military supplies and equipment. It is understandable how the Egyptians came to feel they were being used. In hindsight, it is no wonder that thousands of hysterical Egyptians poured into the streets to celebrate the Soviet ouster as an assertion of national pride and identity. While one might reason that these problems could have been avoided, more pertinent to the United States is some degree of assurance that it does not commit similar type errors in judgment in its military air program to Egypt. This not only applies to the internal management of such a program but also to the broader US foreign policy efforts in the Middle East.

Notes

1. The examples of Soviet involvement described in this text, some of which were handled ineptly—others not—were not all the result of the officers and diplomats on station. Some events were created by decisions from Moscow and, to some degree, defined and carried out by those on scene. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the fuller implications of this factor, this kind of experience should be noted.
2. Mohammed Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 59.
3. Anouar Abdel Malek, *Egypt: Military Society* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 103.
4. Jon D. Glassman, *Arms for the Arabs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 18.
5. Interview with Egyptian Navy Officers, Newport, 7 May 1981. Statements from Egyptian officers in general indicate that early opinion of the Soviet support was quite good.
6. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 19.
7. Heikal, p. 184.
8. Glassman, p. 74.
9. Heikal, p. 238.
10. "Summary of Sadat Talk on Soviet Ties," *The New York Times*, 19 July 1972, p. 15.
11. "U.S. Officials Pleased at Sadat's Action," *The New York Times*, 20 July 1972, p. 7.
12. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 1294.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 1296.
14. "Egypt, Everybody Out," *The Economist*, 2 September 1972, p. 34.
15. Henry Tanner, "Sadat's Ouster of Russians Called Cool and Deliberate," *The New York Times*, 22 July 1972, p. 1.
16. Harry B. Ellis, "Soviet-Egyptian Friction," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 July 1972, p. 2.
17. Glassman, p. 93.
18. Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 230.
19. Heikal, p. 238.
20. Henry Tanner, "The Exodus Updated with a Soviet Cast," *The New York Times*, 23 July 1972, p. 1E.
21. Heikal, p. 243. This change in officer quality was also substantiated by several other sources and interviews.
22. Interview with Egyptian officer, Washington, 14 May 1981.
23. Heikal, p. 283.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Sadat, p. 230.
26. Walter Laqueur, "On the Soviet Departure from Egypt," *Commentary*, 8 December 1972, pp. 55-56.
27. Ihsan Hijanzi, "Beirut Sources Assert Move Was Forced by Sadat's Officers," *The New York Times*, 21 July 1972, p. 1.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
29. Chaim Herzog, "Mideast: Soviet Exodus from Egypt," *The New York Times*, 20 September 1972, p. 47.
30. Paul Wobl, "Soviet Tactlessness—How Big a Part in Egyptian Rift?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 July 1972, p. 2.
31. Interview with Egyptian Navy Officers.
32. Hijanzi, p. 1.

33. William Beecher "Watch on the Suez," *Army*, November 1971, p. 11, quotes a well informed source in Cairo that the Russians had ten advisors in most battalions with two in the HQ and two in each of the four companies. Egyptian Officers also stated that the Russian advisors on each patrol boat were permanently on board with the advisor living in a cabin adjacent to the CO's.

34. Interview with Trevor N. Dupuy, President of Historical Evaluation and Research Organization, Dunn Loring, Virginia, 15 May 1981.

35. "Egypt, Everybody Out," p. 35.

36. Beecher, p. 10.

37. Rubinstein, p. 195.

38. Mohammed Heikal, *Road to Ramadan* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1975), p. 160.

39. Glassman, pp. 107-109.

40. Tanner, p. 1.

41. Sadat, p. 187.

42. Interview with Egyptian officer, Washington, 14 May 1981.

43. Ellis, p. 2.

44. Personal observations of author while serving with UNTSO forces in Israel.

45. Beecher, p. 10, relates the well known story as well as Laqueur and others, including several Egyptian officers for whom this story "typified" their relationship with the Russians.

46. Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 213.

47. Wohl, p. 2.

48. *The Christian Science Monitor*, 17 October 1972, p. 3.

49. Interview with Egyptian officer, Washington, 14 May 1981.

50. Wohl, p. 2.

51. Glassman, p. 220.

52. Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 279.

53. Rubinstein, p. 22.



"A soldier should be sworn to the patient endurance of hardships, like the ancient knights; and it is not the least of these necessary hardships to have to serve with sailors."

Field Marshal Montgomery