

There is no need to mention the necessity of a military school for every modern army. This was especially true for Egypt, in which the overwhelming majority of army leaders came from the army. The question of a college became intense. Since 1955, Egyptians had explored options for Czechoslovak participation in specialized courses. Since infiltration into the Egyptian armed forces was a goal of Soviet leadership, Czechoslovakia responded positively to the Egyptian plea. At the end of 1956, instructors from the VAZ Academy of the Antonín Zápotocký Military Academy in Alexandria began to work in Alexandria. The Egyptians enjoyed these courses so much that they decided to turn to the Czechoslovak development of such a university.

As further support for Nasser's regime, it was highly desirable from the point of view of the Soviet Union's policy and its interests in the Middle East that nothing should stand in the way of further cooperation. Assistance to Egypt by the Soviet bloc states in the development of the former's armed forces became a priority in the bipolar world, which was to be given the greatest attention by the Moscow leadership and Soviet satellites, including Czechoslovakia.

Emergence of an independent Military Technical College in Cairo

On the basis of the decision of the communist party in Czechoslovakia, a plan for the construction of a separate university in Egypt was adopted. The Czechoslovak VAAZ would be the model for the future school. Teachers were also to be sent to Egypt from the Academy in Brno. General Josef Zuska became the first commander of Czechoslovak experts in the construction of the Military Technical College (MTC).²

The first group of Czechoslovaks arrived in Cairo during February of 1959. A small group of students began studying there. After the school was moved to more robust buildings, the number of students and Czechoslovak experts increased.

As early as the 1960s, Czechoslovak assistance in the construction of the MTC entered a crisis. The place of gen. Zuska was taken over by Lieutenant Colonel Oswald Vašíček, who did not have the proper experience with the development of such a school. The task thus exceeded his capabilities and, in addition, there were serious conflicts with the Egyptian school senior administration.³

² Central Military Archive– Administrative archive of Czech republic's Army Olomouc (VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc), fond 538 – VAAZ, karton 421, Kontrakt 40-66-32.

³ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 421, Contracts.; SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 418, Materiel from methodic employment for evaluation of action at MTC. Talk of Lt. Svatopluk Slaviček – „Method of employment at MTC“, pp. 3–4.

Development of MTC in the first half of the 1960s

It was not until 1962 that the MTC, by the decree of the President of the Republic, was embedded in the system of Egyptian higher education and thus received the right to award such academic degrees as BSc, MSc. and Ph.D.⁴ The MTC was built according to the Czechoslovak concept and, in essence, corresponded to the needs of building contemporary modern armies, although it was characterized by a number of specifics of the Arab world.⁵ For predominantly atheistic Czechoslovak teachers, for example, religious holidays caused some stress. Outside of the Ramadan, the lectures were often disturbed by shorter but more frequent Bajrams. There was also a mosque near the school that students could attend at any time to pray.⁶

The MTC was not limited to Egyptian students. After the establishment of the Egyptian-Syrian Union in 1958 (UAR), the school began to accept Syrian students. However, according to the memories of Czechoslovak teachers, relations between the Egyptians and the Syrians were not the best and there were pressures to increase the failure rate of Syrian students.⁷

In order to calm the situation within the Czechoslovak group, a new leader arrived in Egypt, Gen. Jan Bělohoubek. At the time of his arrival, teaching at the MTC took place in 19 departments and, for the time being, in one specialization. Czechoslovak teachers occupied the majority of positions in most departments.⁸

The areas where Czechoslovak experts did a great deal of work were the mandatory practices of Egyptian cadets in both manufacturing and military services. Here we must take into account the fact that any requirement for manual work by the students was rejected once the school began to function.⁹

The education of the Egyptian pedagogical corps was a tricky issue. At that time in Czechoslovakia, several members of the Egyptian Army successfully

⁴ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 415, Administrative letter EAR.; VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 418, Materiel from methodic employment for evaluation of action at MTC. Czechoslovak cooperation in the development of MTC, pp. 1–2.

⁵ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 418, Materiel from methodic employment for evaluation of action at MTC. Report of leader of Czechoslovak experts at MTC about the results of action at MTC and about experience from its implementation, pp. 14–15.

⁶ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 415, Experience and knowledge acquired during the activities at MTC in Cairo.

⁷ ABS, f. ZSGŠ, a.č. 81, Vašíček Osvald, Appendix č. 1 k čj. 007101.

⁸ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 420, Report on the change of Czechoslovak leadership at MTC in Cairo; VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. personal reports of soldiers, personal file of Genlt. Ing. Jan Bělohoubek, Proposal for reserve replacement.

VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 420, Report on the change of Czechoslovak leadership at MTC in Cairo.

⁹ Ibid.

completed their Ph.D. Other Egyptians studied in the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany.¹⁰

1967 – A Milestone year in the development of MTC

The second half of the 1960s, when Egypt closely co-operated with the USSR, provided ideal conditions for cooperation with Czechoslovakia. The Egyptians implemented a number of measures that the Czechoslovaks welcomed and characterized as “steps on the path of non-capitalist development.”¹¹

The conflict with Israel affected both Egypt and MTC. After long-running tensions, on June 5, 1967, Israel attacked targets in Egypt and Syria via air strikes. Within a few hours, Israeli pilots had destroyed most of the Egyptian Air Force. Subsequent war operations led to the complete defeat of the Egyptian army. At MTC there were holidays at that time, so most Czechoslovak experts and their families were in Czechoslovakia. However, the conflict was reflected in a significant decline in the number of Egyptian teachers. Immediately after the fighting, the Egyptian side explored the possibilities of further supplies of war fighting materiel. That effort was successful and until 1971, agreements were concluded with a total volume of more than 3 billion CZK.¹²

1967 also became a particular dividing point in the development of the MTC. Czechoslovak experts, whose numbers peaked between 1966 and 1968, still covered most of the educational processes at this time. Simultaneously, postgraduate studies were introduced to the MTC. Nevertheless, this period was characterized as a stage of the quantitative and qualitative growth of the school in the preparation of expert staff for the needs of the Egyptian army. Two-level study was dropped and the educational process was aimed toward five-year study, as at VAAZ.¹³

¹⁰ VÚA v SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 419, Position and recommendations of Czechoslovak delegation with regard to common cooperation debated with the commander of MTC Gen. M.I.H. Selim from 23 June to 12 July 1965.

¹¹ Brož, I. (2010). *Arabsko-izraelské války 1948–1973*. Praha: Epocha, p. 198.; VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 419, Contemporary state of development at MTC and main tasks of this development, p. 4.; Ivan Brož (1938–2012) author of non-fiction literature participated at MTC during the years 1963–1966 in the role of interpreter.

¹² VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 419, Contemporary state of development at MTC and main tasks of this development, s. 4; VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 416, Stanovisko VAAZ report PV ČSSR (VTA Káhira).

¹³ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 418, Materiel from methodical employment to evaluation of action at MTC. Report of leader of Czechoslovak experts at MTC about the results of action at MTC and about experience from its implementation, pp. 14–15.

August 1968 – Beginnings of personnel crises

In the summer of 1968 the process of reformation in Czechoslovakia was aborted by violent occupation. Previous liberal tendencies were also manifested in the Czechoslovak army, and for those in the army who had been working in essentially capitalist Egypt, these tendencies were very strong. It was obvious that the new pro-Moscow leadership in Prague would soon carry out extensive purges in both Czechoslovak society and the army. In Egypt, Gen. Josef Vosáhlo had arrived for this purpose. He belonged to the younger generation of Czechoslovak generals of pro-Russian leaning and soon began purging his subordinates in Egypt.

A large number of contracted Czechoslovak experts, either directly in Cairo or at home in Czechoslovakia, joined various protests against the invasion and, for these reasons, their presence abroad and in the army became impossible. As a result of staff cleansing among Czechoslovak educators, there would emerge a general shortage of teachers to cover teaching in Egypt. The public sector – civilian universities, scientific institutions and the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences – required attention in Czechoslovakia.¹⁴

Kvantitative perspective of actions at MTC¹⁵

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|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| School year | <u>1959</u> | <u>1960</u> | <u>1961</u> | <u>1962</u> | <u>1963</u> | <u>1964</u> | <u>1965</u> | <u>1966</u> | <u>1967</u> | <u>1968</u> |
| | 1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963 | 1964 | 1965 | 1966 | 1967 | 1968 | 1969 |
| Number of experts | 36 | 68 | 75 | 85 | 141 | 151 | 161 | 202 | 191 | 154 |
| School year | <u>1967</u> | <u>1968</u> | <u>1969</u> | <u>1970</u> | <u>1971</u> | <u>1972</u> | <u>1973</u> | <u>1974</u> | <u>1975</u> | <u>1976</u> |
| | 1968 | 1969 | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 |
| Number of experts | 191 | 154 | 157 | 171 | 164 | 172 | 168 | 149 | 75 | 29 |

¹⁴ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. 538 – VAAZ, kart. 420, Service-political analysis of situation development at MTC from January 1968 to te end of June 1970.

¹⁵ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. Military Academy of Antonín Zápotocký in Brno (VAAZ), f. 418, Materiel from methodical employment to evaluation of action at MTC.

The Yom Kippur War

In 1973, Jaromír Machač became the head of Czechoslovak teachers at the MTC. He received reports that the MTC was being constantly criticized by the army for its lack of research. Czechoslovak leaders interpreted these voices as a preparation of the armed forces for a possible war.¹⁶

After a period of tension, on October 6, 1973, the Egyptian army crossed the Suez and inflicted serious losses upon Israeli forces. After two days of war, Israel's position improved but its image of invulnerability had been shattered. Despite the disruption of air communication with Cairo, the Egyptian Minister of War insisted upon teaching in the 4th and 5th grades at MTC to begin on October 13, 1973. The problem was that at least one third of Czechoslovaks were absent from Cairo. Their tasks were then taken over by their Egyptian colleagues.¹⁷

After the war ended, Czechoslovak experts proposed that the school seize the equipment used by both the Egyptians and the Israelis in the war. Czechoslovaks were interested mainly in American weapons. The official reason was presented as the necessity to modernize the teaching process.¹⁸

The results of the war were also reflected by the leadership of MTC, who realized the necessity of engineer specialization, and decided to establish it in two forms, Mechanical Field Engineering and Structural Field Engineering. In connection with the experience of recent battles, the administration also called for the establishment of a specialization in Electronic Warfare. This, however, exceeded the actual possibilities of the Czechoslovak party and, therefore, the Egyptians had to rely on the Soviets.¹⁹

¹⁶ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. VAAZ, k. 419, Report on change in leadership at MTC – Káhira; Ibid, f. 421, Report on the situation at MTC; VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. Personal correspondence of soldiers, Personal report of Jaromír Machač, Personal report – Service in the new CSR Army.

¹⁷ Zídek, P. – Sieber, K. (2009). *Czechoslovakia and Near East in years 1948–1989*. Praha: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, pp. 81–82; Wanner, J. (2002). *Krvavý Jom Kippur*. Praha: Libri, pp. 161–162, 167, 287; VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. VAAZ, k. 416, Zpráva z MTC – adjustment to contract; Ibid, k. 421, Report on activities from 1. September to 15. November 1973.

¹⁸ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. VAAZ, f. 416, Report from MTC – proposal of contract adjustment; Ibid, Report on the activities of experts at MTC in Cairo. Proposal for organization structure at MTC. proposal of contract adjustment n. 17 year 1974/75; Ibid, Czechoslovak leader at MTC debates Egyptian Minister of War.

¹⁹ Ibid, Report from MTC – proposal of contract adjustment.

Departure of Czechoslovak teachers

Following a meeting in July of 1974, the Minister of War received proposals by Czechoslovak experts on strengthening the military character of the school. But the promised support vanished. At the request of the Minister, a committee dealing with the further development of the school was at least established. Based on agreement between Gen. Machač and Commander of MTC, the committee began working on a draft for ten-year plan of cooperation. The plan ought to reflect requirements for the establishment of an engineer specialization and specialization in the fight against radio-technical means.²⁰

The Yom Kipur War of October 1973 became an important landmark in Anwar Sadat's Egyptian politics. As a result of its consequences, reforms were to begin and Egypt, through its new "open door policy," began economic and political liberalization, coupled with an overall pro-American orientation. While the Eastern Bloc, headed by the Soviet Union, tried to maintain its position in the Middle East, it was unable to effectively cope with the gradual change. The new course of Egyptian politics was also reflected within the army and at the MTC.

With the new leadership of the school, the relationship gradually changed with the Czechoslovak group. The presence of a group of Czechoslovak workers, as citizens of the eastern bloc and largely Communists, on the territory of Egypt had become an unpleasant fact that might complicate relations with the West. Moreover, the situation evolved to a point where Czechoslovak teachers could be replaced by Egyptian teachers.²¹

The circumstances escalated in 1976, when President Sadat denounced the Soviet-Egyptian agreement on friendship and cooperation, concluded in late May of 1971. The situation in Egypt deteriorated both for the Soviets and Czechoslovak teachers at the MTC, and there was clearly a cooling of mutual relations.²²

The signs of an early change occurred in June, 1977, when Egyptian officials rushed to withdraw several dozen Egyptian students from Ph.D. studies in Czechoslovakia.²³ In July of 1977, the leadership of Czechoslovak workers at MTC

²⁰ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. VAAZ, k. 416, Report on activities of leader of Czechoslovak experts at MTC in Cairo; *ibid.*, k. 418, Materiel from methodic employment to evaluation of MTC action.

²¹ Author's archive (AA), recording of interview with Svatopluk Slaviček 11. 3. 2008; VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. VAAZ, k. 416, Report on the activities of Czechoslovak experts at MTC in Cairo 3. March 1976.

²² VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. VAAZ, k. 416, Reports from MTC year 1976; Bareš, L. – Veselý, R. – Gombár, E. (2010). *Dějiny Egypta*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, p. 684.

²³ VÚA – SA AČR Olomouc, f. VAAZ, k. 416, k. 418, Materiel from methodic employment to evaluation of MTC action.

was told that the contract would not be renewed from the Egyptian side. At the same time, the date for leaving Cairo was established as 1st September, 1977.²⁴

After this date, all Czechoslovaks left the school and all the functions were taken over by the Egyptians. This date ended the most important action of its kind, upon which Czechoslovakia had participated.

Conclusion

Czechoslovakia, as a Soviet satellite, participated in the development of an Egyptian military college from 1959 to 1977. Moscow and the Czechoslovak leadership understood its participation as an absolute priority at the MTC Military Technical College, becoming a unique opportunity to influence the Egyptian armed forces and thus their Egyptian partner. For this reason, economic interests faded into the background and were outweighed by political interests. It is certain, however, that over the course of 20 years, the Czechoslovak side had managed to establish and bring to life a school that functions to this date and remains an important military-scientific institution in the Middle East.

The presence of Czechoslovaks at MTC in Cairo was not the sole action of Czechoslovakia in this kind of endeavor. Another such case was the teaching at the military technical academy in Poll-i-Kharkhi, Afghanistan. In the mid-1960s, VAAZ prepared a project documentation for the development of a military school in Syria, and in the following decade the documentation for the military joint school in Syrian Homs and for the Air Force Technical Academy in Libya. Experiences from Egypt served the Czechoslovak experts well during the years 1978 to 1985, when they taught at the Military Technical College in Baghdad.

The data for the research was collected mainly in the archives in Prague (Central Military Archive of Czech republic's Army) and its branch offices in Prague and Olomouc.

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²⁴ Ibid, Action VTA – termination; Report on activities of leader of Czechoslovak experts at MTC 22. April 1977.