

Significant Cases of Global Arms Trade

Egyptian–Czechoslovak arms deal

Key Data:**Years:** 1955¹⁴**Involved Countries:** Egypt; Czechoslovakia (USSR)**Weapon Systems:** 100 T-34 tanks and IS-3 Stalin tanks, 80 MIG-15 jet fighter planes, 30 Ilyushin IL-28 bombers, large quantities of self-propelled guns, armored personnel carriers, artillery equipment, several naval vessels, small arms and munitions, representing a staggering 85 percent of all foreign weapons shipped to the Middle East between 1951-1956.²**Arms Producers:****Perpetrators/Involved Parties:** The Egyptian government, under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the Czechoslovak government.**Victims/Affected:** The deal did not have any direct victims, but it did contribute to the growing tensions between Egypt and the Western powers, which ultimately led to the Suez Crisis in 1956.³

Case

The Egyptian–Czechoslovak arms deal was a significant event in the Cold War era and played a pivotal role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The agreement, which was signed in September 1955, was led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the then-president of Egypt, and involved the USSR supplying Egypt with over \$83 million worth of modern Soviet weaponry, facilitated through Czechoslovakia⁴.

The deal marked a turning point in the Cold War as it signified the growing influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, and the increasing challenge it posed to the United States' efforts to contain communism. The arms deal also highlighted the strategic importance of the Middle East and the region's role in global politics.

The impact of the Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms deal was far-reaching. On one hand, it enabled Egypt to build up its military capabilities, which in turn strengthened its position in

¹ "An arms race occurs when two or more countries increase the size and quality of military resources to gain military and political superiority over one another. The Cold War between the United..." URL: <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/arms-race>

² 8. Shaughnessy Skaggs, Thomas (2015-12-01). "The Czech-Egyptian arms deal of 1955 : a turning point in Middle Eastern Cold War history" (<https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd/2287>). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. doi:10.18297/etd/2287 (<https://doi.org/10.18297%2Fetd%2F2287>).

³ 14. "The Historical Place of the Czech-Egyptian Arms Deal", Fall 1955, Motti Golani, Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 31, No. 4, Israel (Oct., 1995), pp. 803–827 (<https://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/4283762?uid=3739560&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21101388715613>)

⁴ "The Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms deal was an agreement between the USSR and Egypt led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, announced in September 1955, to supply Egypt with more than \$83 million worth of modern Soviet weaponry, through Czechoslovakia. The deal was a major turning point in the Cold War and greatly impacted the Arab-Israeli conflict ." URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian%E2%80%93Czechoslovak_arms_deal

the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the other hand, it also led to a significant arms race between Israel and its Arab neighbors, who saw the deal as a direct threat to their national security.⁵

The arms deal also had a significant impact on the Suez Crisis, which took place in 1956. The crisis, which involved a military conflict between Egypt and Israel, as well as British and French intervention, was sparked by the nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptian government. The arms deal played a key role in fueling the crisis, as it emboldened Nasser to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy and strengthened his hand in negotiations with the British and French.⁶

Moreover, the Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms deal had important implications for the Cold War-era arms race. The deal was seen as a challenge to the United States' efforts to contain Soviet influence, and it led to a further escalation of tensions between the two superpowers. In response to the deal, the United States increased its support for Israel and other Middle Eastern countries, which in turn led to further arms buildups in the region.⁷

The Czech-Egyptian arms deal also had significant military implications. The Soviet-supplied weapons, including tanks, artillery, and aircraft, enabled Egypt to modernize its military and significantly increase its firepower. The deal also allowed Egypt to establish a closer relationship with the Soviet Union, which provided it with military advisors and technical support, further enhancing its military capabilities.⁸

In conclusion, the Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms deal was a major turning point in the Cold War and had far-reaching implications for the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the global arms race. The deal marked a significant shift in the balance of power in the region, and its legacy can still be felt today, particularly in the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

Commentary

The Egyptian–Czechoslovak arms deal, announced in September 1955, had a significant impact on the Suez Crisis. The deal was an agreement between the USSR and Egypt, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, to supply Egypt with more than \$83 million worth of modern Soviet

⁵ "Egyptian arms deal. Bar-On also explains why it took Israel a full year to launch a war after the deal's existence became known: Israel, he says, needed time to arrange a counter-deal of its own, and then the Suez crisis broke at a convenient time. Still, Bar-On's study rests on the conventional wisdom that the arms deal" URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4283762>

⁶ "Within the first hours of the war, all of Egypt's airfields were struck, and most Egyptian planes were demolished on the ground. In the Sinai Peninsula, Egyptian forces were defeated and put to flight. An estimated 10,000 Egyptians died, and the Israelis reached the Suez Canal on June 8." URL: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Egypt/The-revolution-and-the-Republic>

⁷ "Source: Department of State, S/S - NSC Files: Lot 63 D 351, NSC 5428 Memos (Nov.-Dec. 1955). Top Secret. The source text is a copy that Lay circulated on October 21 as an enclosure to a memorandum to the members of the National Security Council as well as to the Secretary of the Treasury, the Attorney General, the Special Assistant to the President on Disarmament, the Director of the ..." URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v14/ch2?start=91>

⁸ "thesis argues that the Czech-Egyptian arms deal was the seminal moment that redefined 4*ibid.*, 1-4. 5 Guy Laron, "Logic Dictates That They May Attack When They Feel They Can Win: The 1955 Czech-Egyptian Arms Deal, the Egyptian Army, and Israeli Intelligence," *The Middle East Journal* Middle East 63.1 (2009): 70." URL: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3343&context=etd>

weaponry, through Czechoslovakia.⁹ The deal was a major turning point in the Cold War and greatly impacted the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁹

The Egyptian–Czechoslovak arms deal was the first divergence of Egyptian policy away from Western regional dominance, and a major success in achieving a policy of non-alignment.¹⁰ Prior to the deal, Egypt had attempted to buy weapons from Western countries but had been unsuccessful. In contrast, the Soviet Union provided Egypt with significant amounts of weapons, which allowed it to better resist British, French, and Israeli aggression during the Suez Crisis.¹¹

The deal helped Egypt build up its military capabilities, and it was believed to be a major factor in Egypt's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal in 1956. The Suez Crisis was triggered when Britain, France, and Israel launched a military attack against Egypt following its nationalization of the canal.¹² Egypt's increased military capabilities, including the Soviet-supplied MiG-15 fighter planes and heavy bombers, enabled it to put up a strong resistance against the invading forces. The Suez Crisis had momentous consequences for all the parties involved, but Egypt benefited from it by gaining greater control over the Suez Canal.¹²

In summary, the Egyptian–Czechoslovak arms deal played a crucial role in the Suez Crisis by providing Egypt with modern Soviet weaponry, which strengthened its military capabilities and enabled it to resist British, French, and Israeli aggression during the crisis. The deal also allowed Egypt to move away from Western regional dominance and pursue a policy of non-alignment.^{9 10 11 12}

Additional Information / additional Sources

⁹ "The Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms deal was an agreement between the USSR and Egypt led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, announced in September 1955, to supply Egypt with more than \$83 million worth of modern Soviet weaponry, through Czechoslovakia. The deal was a major turning point in the Cold War and greatly impacted the Arab-Israeli conflict . History" URL:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian%E2%80%93Czechoslovak_arms_deal

¹⁰ "1956 Suez Crisis, and the formation of the United Arab Republic in 1958 were the three most important Pan-Arab moments. This assessment misses the importance of the Czech arms deal as being the first divergence of Egyptian policy away from Western regional dominance, and a major success in achieving a policy of Non-Alignment and should be"

URL: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3343&context=etd>

¹¹ "One such strike—an attack on Gaza in February 1955 that killed 38 Egyptians—exposed the military weakness of the Free Officer regime, which tried, but failed, to buy weapons from Western countries. In September 1955 Nasser announced that an arms agreement had been signed between Egypt and Czechoslovakia (acting for the Soviet Union)."

URL: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Egypt/The-revolution-and-the-Republic>

¹² "The Czech arms deal was really a Soviet-Egyptian arms deal, and it had far-reaching repercussions ... The Suez crisis had momentous consequences for all the parties involved. How did Egypt benefit from the Suez Crisis? ... Of the three invading states, Britain was most severely damaged by its role in the Suez affair." URL: <https://quizlet.com/ca/660960189/foreign-relations-after-1952-egypt-britain-and-the-suez-crisis-of-1956-flash-cards/>

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