WHERE IS THE MIDDLE EAST?

By Roderic H. Davison

INTERNATIONAL crisis is one of the best teachers of geography. Among the centers of crisis that have burst onto the American public's map in recent years are Suez, Cyprus, Baghdad, Algeria, the Lebanon and others commonly lumped together today under the general label "Middle East." In the context of the cold war, the Middle East has rapidly emerged as a primary center of concern for American foreign policy.

Yet the fact remains that no one knows where the Middle East is, although many claim to know. Scholars and governments have produced reasoned definitions that are in hopeless disagreement. There is no accepted formula, and serious efforts to define the area vary by as much as three to four thousand miles east and west. There is not even an accepted core for the Middle East. Involved in the terminological chaos is of course the corollary question of how the Middle East relates to the Near East—or, indeed, whether the Near East still exists at all.

What might be simply a comedy of semantic confusion is rendered more serious because popular use of the neologism Middle East has obliged scholars and specialists to employ it also, to their disadvantage. The United States Government as well has now begun to use the term officially, but in varying senses that add to the general obfuscation.

In 1957 a national policy, the so-called Eisenhower Doctrine, was established to provide for American military and economic aid to nations in "the general area of the Middle East," to use the language of the Congressional resolution. Committees of the House and Senate naturally asked Secretary of State Dulles to define the region where the United States was prepared to act. Mr. Dulles furnished a reasonably exact definition of the Middle East: "the area lying between and including Libya on the west and Pakistan on the east and Turkey on the north and the Arabian peninsula to the south," plus the Sudan and Ethiopia. He added that Middle East and Near East were now, in his view, identical. With this understanding, the resolution passed both houses.

A year later came the Lebanese crisis, the July 14 revolution in Iraq, and the dispatch of American and British troops to the Lebanon and Jordan. President Eisenhower addressed a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on August 13, 1958. Throughout his speech he mentioned the Near East frequently, but not the Middle East. Reporters queried the State Department to find out exactly what area his proposal applied to. They were told by the Department that Near East and Middle East were interchangeable terms to designate an area comprising Egypt, Syria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms.[1] This differed widely from the Secretary's own definiton of the year before by cutting out over two-thirds of *his* Middle East.

[1] *The New York Times*, August 14, 1958. Probably the Yemen was inadvertently omitted from this list, and possibly the Sudan.

Up to this point the State Department knew no Middle East at all in its own organization. It had only an Office of Near Eastern Affairs—whose bailiwick, characteristically, coincided neither with President Eisenhower's Near East nor with Secretary Dulles' Middle East. Then, at the end of 1958, the Middle East crept into the Department's table of organization through the Office of Research. A newly created Aegean and Middle East Division in that office was to cover Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since Greece surely, and Turkey probably, must be counted as Aegean states, only four are left to make up the Middle East. No Arab state is included.

Actually the confusion in nomenclature originated in the Great Power politics of the first part of this century. If there is a villain in the piece, it is the British Government. Captain Mahan, the American naval officer, and Valentine Chirol, foreign editor of *The Times* of London, are unwitting accessories before the fact. But fundamentally the power and parochial outlook of the western nations are responsible. All civilizations, east and west, have stuck convenient labels on distant lands, and the west has not been alone in this practice. To the Turks, for instance, all Western Europe was for centuries simply *Frengistan,* "the land of the Franks," and even today Morocco is for Arabs the "far west," *al-maghreb al-aksa.* But it has been western, not eastern, terminology that has girdled the globe, along with the spread of western civilization and political influence.

II

The ancient Greeks used to divide the world into the cultured south and the barbarian north. It was with Rome that the concept of an East-West division began. Later, with the age of exploration, it became common to designate China, Japan and Malaysia as Far or Farther East. This distinction persisted until the end of the nineteenth century. Seen from Europe, there were the East and the Far East. For Europe, the East began where the Ottoman Empire began. Metternich is supposed to have said that "Asia begins on the Landstrasse." But in the early nineteenth century most Europeans agreed with Kinglake who, reporting on his travels of 1834, found that the East began at Belgrade, where he crossed from Hapsburg into Ottoman domains. His delightful account, "Eöthen, or Traces of Travel Brought Home from the East," discoursed on the Balkans, Syria, Palestine and Egypt, which Kinglake saw no reason to chop off from the eastern continuum with a label of Near or Middle East. Similarly, the "Eastern Question" came to denote the contest of European Powers for influence in Ottoman lands.

In the 1890s came the first shift in terms. The label Near East elbowed its way into popular usage as a by-product of the great decade of European imperialism. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 produced an unstable situation that led to competiton among the Great Powers for spheres of influence in China. At the same time the Armenian massacres coupled with Cretan and Macedonian troubles brought new crises involving the fate of the Ottoman Empire. Europe awoke to the fact that there were now two Eastern questions, Far and Near. By 1896 the term Near East had become current. Old hands grumbled somewhat at the new label, but it stuck, sometimes rendered as Nearer East.

An epoch-making geography, "The Nearer East," published in 1902 by D. G. Hogarth, an English archaeologist and traveler who knew the region from the inside, helped both to fix the term and define its limits. "The Nearer East," said Hogarth somewhat ruefully, "is a term of current fashion for a region which our grandfathers were content to call simply the East." "Few probably could say offhand where should be the limits and why," he continued, but then intrepidly proceeded to set bounds. His Near East included Albania, Montenegro, southern Serbia and Bulgaria, Greece, Egypt, all the Ottoman lands of Asia with the entire Arabian peninsula, and two-thirds of Iran, up to its "waist," a stretch of sterile desert and mountain between the Caspian and the Indian Ocean. Not everyone agreed with these exact limits for the Near East, but with its approximate scope there was little quarrel.

In the same year in which Hogarth put the stamp of geographical approval on the new Near East, Middle East was also born. This was the creation of the American naval officer, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan had made his reputation with the publication in 1890 of "The Influence of Sea Power upon History." Soon he was sought out by magazine editors for articles on naval affairs and world strategy. Russian expansion, the partition of China, and the German penetration of Turkey, as well as the American conquest of the Philippines, turned Mahan's attention to Asia. Among his articles on Asia was a piece on "The Persian Gulf and International Relations" which appeared in the September 1902 issue of the *National Review* of London. Here Mahan considered the Anglo-Russian contest along with the new element of the projected German Berlin-to-Baghdad railway with its probable terminus on the Persian Gulf. Envisioning the desirability of Anglo-German coöperation to keep the Russians out, he affirmed the need for Britain to maintain a strong naval position, with bases, in the Persian Gulf region. "The Middle East, if I may adopt a term which I have not seen, will some day need its Malta, as well as its Gibraltar. . . . The British Navy should have the facility to concentrate in force, if occasion arises, about Aden, India and the Gulf." And so the term Middle East saw the light of day just over a half-century ago. But Captain Mahan drew no exact bounds. For him the Middle East was an indeterminate area guarding a part of the sea route from Suez to Singapore. *The Times* was furnished by the *National Review* with advance proofs of Mahan's article, and found it worthy of long extracts, but neither quoted nor commented upon the new term.

Within two months, however, on October 14, 1902, *The Times* carried the first of a series of articles from its special correspondent, this one datelined Tehran under the heading "The Middle Eastern Question." Nineteen more lengthy dispatches followed, each under the same headline. The unnamed correspondent was Valentine Chirol, already known as a writer on the East, with one book on Greeks and Turks and a second on "The Far Eastern Question." Chirol had read his Mahan in the *National Review*, and had seized on Middle East as the title for his own forthcoming reports from the lands of the western and northern approaches to India. The rapid advance in Asia of the Russians alarmed Chirol. "To them," he wrote in his first article, "Tehran is merely one link in a long chain which stretches from Constantinople to Peking, and the pressure they apply in Persia is perhaps not

infrequently meant to be felt as much in the Far East or in the Near East as in what Captain Mahan has aptly christened the Middle East." Chirol's use of the term made it familiar to a wide public.

Mahan's essentially naval concept of the Middle East was expanded by Chirol to embrace a wider area. Chirol included the approaches to India, land and sea: Persia, the Gulf, Iraq, the eastern coasts of Arabia, Afghanistan and Tibet. This was made plainer when the articles, slightly revised, appeared in book form as "The Middle Eastern Question, or Some Political Problems of Indian Defence." Mahan was again acknowledged as author of the term, which Chirol now defined as "those regions of Asia which extend to the borders of India or command the approaches to India, and which are consequently bound up with the problems of Indian political as well as military defence. The Middle Eastern Question is itself only a part of a much larger question upon which the future of Asia depends. . . . It is the outcome of that constant projection of European forces—moral, commercial, and miltary—into Asia which is slowly but steadily transforming all the conditions that enabled us to achieve, and so far to retain as masters of India, a position of unparalleled ascendancy in the Asiatic continent." Near East, Middle East, Far East were all projections of European—particularly British—thinking. The old Eastern Question, as Chirol pointed out, had been extended by recent events across all Asia. One segment had been chopped off for the Far East, another for the Near East. Now he chopped off the Middle East as a separate unit. On the day when Chirol's concluding article was published, *The Times,* editorially, used Middle East without embarrassment to indicate India and its approaches.

Middle East became fixed in the English lexicon on the Mahan-Chirol pattern. The Near East centered on Turkey, the Middle East on India, the Far East on China. The whole East, like all Gaul, was divided into three parts.

III

After World War I things began to change. The Balkan Wars of 1912–13 had already driven the Turks from all but a corner of their European territories. By 1918 their control over the Arab lands was also gone. France became the mandatory for Syria and the Lebanon, Britain for Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq. In British thinking these chunks of territory tended to become assimilated to the approaches to India. Middle East then began to edge over into Near East. On March 1, 1921, Winston Churchill gave official sanction to the Middle Eastern aggression against the Near East. As Secretary of State for Colonies, he set up in the Colonial Office a Middle Eastern Department to supervise Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq. He was not without learned support from the Royal Geographical Society, which the Society was later to regret. Its Permanent Commission on Geographical Names had resolved the year before that henceforth the Near East should denote only the Balkans; the lands from the Bosphorus to the eastern frontiers of India would be named Middle East. In this fashion the Middle East burst onto the Mediterranean coast.

Thus suddenly to try to thrust the Near East out of Asia introduced a confusion heretofore unknown. The new and broader Middle East concept

was far from winning general approval in Britain, much less in America. The Near East College Association, Near East Relief and the Near East Foundation pursued their work in former Ottoman lands of Asia with no change of name. Americans generally adhered to the Near East of Hogarth, the Middle East of Chirol. Of another British-created Middle East nothing, happily, was heard in America, and little in Britain itself. This was the Royal Air Force's Middle East, composed of Egypt, the Sudan and Kenya. The Middle East crept into Africa noiselessly.

Thus matters stood when in the spring of 1939 it became apparent that Europe was reaching a new crisis. British preparations included, in the eastern Mediterranean, a strengthening of position which was shortly to have an irreversible effect on terminology. The decision had already been made in 1938 that, in case of war, the Middle East Air Command should have control not only over its African hub but also over Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, Aden and Malta, heretofore independent commands. The British army followed suit in 1939 by consolidating the separate commands of Egypt, the Sudan and Palestine-Transjordan, and by adding Cyprus, Iraq, Aden, British Somaliland and the Persian Gulf. Presently General Wavell was sent to Cairo as Commander-in-Chief, Middle East.

For the first year of war the 1939 version of Middle East meant little to the public. But after the collapse of France and Italy's entry into the conflict in June 1940, the Middle East Command became extremely important. Its Mediterranean fronts were crucial in 1941 and 1942. German troops reinforced the Italians operating from Tripoli and Cyrenaica against Egypt; German conquest poured down through the Balkans into Greece and Crete; further German armies threatened to over-run the Russians and come down through the Caucasus; and Vichy French forces in Syria and an anti-British revolt in Iraq gave added hope to the Nazis. The Middle East Command was now stretched to the utmost in dealing with Ethiopia and the Somalilands and Eritrea, Libya, Greece and Crete, Iraq and Iran. Inevitably the fluctuating area involved in fighting under the Middle East Command was referred to, both popularly and officially, as the Middle East. No definite bounds were ever set to the term, and the territories with which the Command was officially charged varied from time to time. Iran was added in 1942; Eritrea was dropped in September 1941 and welcomed back again five months later. The British created also a Middle East Supply Center and the post of Minister of State in the Middle East, both based on Cairo. The areas over which the Center and the Minister had authority were not quite coterminous, nor yet duplicates of the Middle East Command area, and they fluctuated also; but in general they stretched from Malta to Iran and from Syria to Ethiopia.

Like the Mahan-Chirol Middle East of 40 years before, the Middle East of World War II was a strategic concept imposed from without by British interests. The center had shifted from India to Cairo, but the rationale was similar. As in Mahan's concept, so in the 1940s the fringe was fuzzy, the boundaries undelimitable. Various attempts were made to prove that the undefinable Middle East of World War II was a unit. The major contemporary historian of the area during the war finds a "geopolitical unity" based on

Islam, on traditional European imperialist interests and on the annihilation by plane and motorcar of the Syrian desert barrier between "Near" and "Middle" East.[2] The historian of the Supply Center finds "geographical unity" in an area which depends upon trade through the eastern Mediterranean and Red Seas.[3] But all such justifications break down on examination, and what remains is that the Middle East was "the area included in the army and air commands," as the official British history by I. S. O. Playfair acknowledges.

Churchill, by now Prime Minister, used Middle East accordingly, that is to say in a very loose sense. He was willing to envision Turkey, neutral so far, as coming into the Middle East. He was even prepared to see the Middle East jump into Europe—as he contemplated the "possibility of centre of gravity in Middle East shifting suddenly from Egypt to the Balkans, and from Cairo to Constantinople." He was willing to see Iraq drop out of the Middle East. Sometimes he lapsed into earlier usage and referred to the Arab area as Near East.[4]

In fact Churchill, despite his earlier complicity in moving the Middle East westward, seems to have had qualms all along. "I had always felt," he wrote after the war, "that the name 'Middle East' for Egypt, the Levant, Syria, and Turkey was ill-chosen. This was the Near East. Persia and Iraq were the Middle East; India, Burma and Malaya the East; and China and Japan the Far East."[5] Even this considered statement exhibited confusion. The Levant was nothing if not Syria, yet he distinguished the two; and the East had commonly been divided into three parts rather than Churchill's four. But his instinct was, in 1942 as well as later, officially to reëstablish the Near East in at least a part of its old domain. On August 6, in the face of great difficulties in the North African fighting, Churchill proposed to reorganize the Middle East Command by dividing it. Egypt, Palestine and Syria would become the Near East Command based on Cairo; Persia and Iraq would become the new Middle East Command based on Basra or Baghdad. He pressed the point with the War Cabinet until they agreed to the division, but not to the change in name. To avoid confusion, they insisted that the Middle East Command should remain in Cairo, while Iraq-Persia would simply be detached from it.

Possibly Churchill was impelled to this unsuccessful attempt at correcting area labels by questioning in Parliament, which had begun in the previous year. The first to express doubts was Sir Francis Fremantle, who seized an occasion after General Wavell had been shifted from the Middle East Command in Cairo to India, and General Auchinleck brought from India to Cairo. On July 10, 1941, Sir Francis asked the Prime Minister "whether he will now revert to the previous official description of the Middle East and Near East as corresponding to those countries of which Generals Wavell and Auchinleck are respectively in military command and so avert the present

[2] George Kirk, "The Middle East in the War," in "Survey of International Affairs, 1939–1946," v. 2. London: Oxford, 1952, p. v.

[3] Guy Hunter, "Economic Problems: The Middle East Supply Centre," *ibid.*, p. 169.

[4] *Cf.* Winston S. Churchill, "Their Finest Hour" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), p. 546 and 173–174; and "The Grand Alliance" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), p. 350.

[5] Winston S. Churchill, "The Hinge of Fate." Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950, p. 460.

confusion of terms?" The Government's reply was delivered by Clement Attlee, Lord Privy Seal, in the following colloquy:

"Mr. Attlee: This was considered: but the title of Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, is now so well established that any change now might lead to confusion. For some months at least many people would adhere to the old forms. Documents would lose their continuity. Mistakes costing lives might be made. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is of opinion that it is better to go on as we are.

"Sir F. Fremantle: Is this not an affront to the English language, of which the Prime Minister is a master, in that the dictionary says that 'middle' is that which is equidistant from extremities? What is the extremity on this side from which the Middle East is equidistant?

"Mr. Glenvil Hall: What is the extreme of silliness in questions?"[6]

Evidently Churchill had reversed his views by the summer of 1942, but was unable to convince the War Cabinet. So Cairo remained the center of the Middle East as far as Cabinet and Parliament were concerned until after V-J Day, when members returned to the charge.

The Royal Geographical Society showed less restraint. Blitz and blackout had curtailed but not arrested its program. On May 10, 1943, members listened, evidently with approval, to the veteran diplomat Sir Percy Loraine on "Perspectives of the Near East." Introducing his subject, Sir Percy said: "The term 'Near East' . . . appears to have become almost completely obsolete, but when I was an appreciably younger man there used to be a Near East and a Middle East. Now apparently there is only a Middle East; and the title I chose for my lecture can be taken therefore as to some extent a mild protest against the process of unnecessary assimilation."[7]

Sir Percy found his first ally in this campaign in Colonel Lawrence Martin, chief of the Division of Maps in the Library of Congress, who loosed a public blast against "The Miscalled Middle East." His definitions of Near East and Middle East agreed almost exactly with those Sir Percy had given.[8] "Thoughtful persons," said Martin, adhered to his definition of Near East. The trouble was of course that during the war there were far more fighting persons and political persons than there were "thoughtful persons." American officials from the President on down had succumbed to the British wartime usage of Middle East. By June of 1944 the president of the Royal Geographical Society, Sir George Clerk, also was urging its members to stick to the Loraine-Martin prescription. But it was in vain. The neo-Middle East survived intact to the end of the war.

IV

After the war was won and Attlee had replaced Churchill as Prime Minister, members of the House of Commons resurrected the earlier line of questioning. On April 16, 1946, "Major Symonds asked the Prime Minister whether it is the intention to continue to use the term 'Middle East' to cover those geographical areas which, in the past, have been referred to as

[6] *Parliamentary Debates,* House of Commons, v. 373, columns 308–309.
[7] *Geographical Journal,* London, July 1943, p. 6.
[8] *Geographical Review,* New York, April 1944, p. 335.

'Near East' and 'Middle East'." To this Mr. Attlee replied: "It has become the accepted practice to use the term 'Middle East' to cover the Arab world and certain neighbouring countries. The practice seems to me convenient and I see no reason to change it." Though this imprecision satisfied Mr. Attlee, Mr. Keeling, another member, continued by asking, "If Egypt is to be called the 'Middle East,' where is the 'Near East' now?" "It all depends where you are in the world," was the Prime Minister's answer.[9]

Mr. Keeling was a vice-president of the Royal Geographical Society, and in this capacity also he later approached Mr. Attlee about "those Arab countries generally grouped under the misleading term 'Middle East.'" Mr. Attlee remained firm, though he now provided a different definition for his Middle East—"at least the area of Egypt, Palestine, Cyrenaica, Syria and Lebanon, Transjordan, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula as well as, in most cases, Persia and Turkey."[10] Although this definition of Middle East was unsatisfactory to the Society, it evidently gave up the struggle for principle.

Members of Parliament were slower in accepting the inevitable, and even managed to trap the Government into acknowledging that it was impossible to do what Mr. Attlee had just done twice—to define the Middle East. On May 19, 1947, "Brigadier Low asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs which countries are included in the term 'Middle East' and which in the term 'Near East.'

"Mr. Mayhew [Under-Secretary]: There appears to be no agreed definition of these vague geographical terms.

"Brigadier Low: Since the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friends use these terms is it not a fact that they must know what they mean?

"Mr. Mayhew: Where precision would be required, we should not use these terms."[11]

In 1951 the Government was better prepared. On July 25 in the House of Commons "Surgeon Lieut.-Commander Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs what countries are included in the term, the 'Near East,' as used in official terminology.

"Mr. Ernest Davies [Under-Secretary]: The term 'Near East,' which was connected with the Ottoman Empire, is outmoded in this country and 'Middle East' has superseded it for official purposes. The countries included in the term 'Middle East' are Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Persia, Syria, the Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Trucial Sheikhdoms, Kuweit, Bahrein, Qatar, Muscat, the Aden Protectorate and the Yemen."[12]

The last parliamentary attempt to save the Near East occurred on June 30, 1952, in the following exchange between two members and Mr. Anthony Nutting, Joint Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs:

"Mr. Cocks: What countries now remain in the Near East?

"Mr. Nutting: The term 'Near East' is now outmoded.

"Mr. Nicholson: Does the Government share the view that the East begins at Dover?"[13]

[9] *Parliamentary Debates,* House of Commons, v. 421, columns 2519–2520.
[10] *Geographical Journal,* March–April 1946, p. 85–86.
[11] *Parliamentary Debates,* House of Commons, v. 437, column 1996.
[12] *Ibid.,* v. 491, columns 448–449.
[13] *Ibid.,* v. 503, columns 28–29.

The Government refused to be needled into logical argument by the unreconstructed Near Easterners. Commons thereafter subsided.

Meanwhile the United Nations had become involved in the semantic struggle, but on a different plane. Unhampered by tradition, the new international organization assumed that the Near East was dead and that the problem was simply to delimit Middle East. In the spring of 1948 the question became actual when a suggestion originally made by Dr. Charles Malik of the Lebanon, to create an Economic Commission for the Middle East, was officially sponsored by Egypt. An ad hoc committee to study this question appointed a subcommittee to define the area. From its labors there finally emerged a list of member states considered to be in the Middle East: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the Yemen, Egypt, Ethiopia and Greece. This was the broadest Middle East yet to be officially invented, straddling three continents. It stretched along the southern border of the Soviet bloc from the Albanian to the Chinese frontier.

In the postwar years the result of all this discussion was an unquiet confusion, an agreement to disagree. The British Government continued to regard the Near East as dead. Western Europeans began grudgingly to use the term Middle East, grumbling that it was an Anglo-Saxon invention. In the United Nations, Middle East was the usual term. Statesmen from the eastern Mediterranean countries also found themselves using it, often against their better judgment, for it carried the implication that they were no longer in the Near East, close to the West, but thrust back into Asia in contradiction to their historic connections with Europe and in violation of their cultural and political interests. The United States Government still officially knew no Middle East.

But the American press was never able to cut loose from the British wartime usage of Middle East. Specialists on the area tried to sweep back the tide, on the ground of geographical reason and historical logic, but to no avail. Most forthright were the cartographers. The "Atlas of Islamic History" showed the modern Near East as extending from Egypt's western border to Iran's eastern border, and the Middle East from Afghanistan's western border to Burma's eastern border.[14] The National Geographic Society in 1952 and again in 1956 issued bulletins defining the traditional three Easts as the proper norms. But not even the cartographers could raise the dead. So far as the American public, at least, was concerned, the quiet funeral of the Near East may be said to have occurred at the time of the Israeli invasion of Egypt. *The New York Times* put the obituary simply: "Middle East is now (as of Nov. 1, 1956) used in preference to Near East to conform to the change in general usage."[15] The new Middle East was here to stay, but Mahan and Chirol would not have known their child.

V

It remained then for specialists who accepted the new Middle East with good or ill grace to try to define the area. They have produced definitions in profusion. Some apply spatial terms to a chronological sequence, making

[14] Harry W. Hazard, ed., 3rd ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954, p. 34, 35, 41.
[15] *The New York Times Index*, 1956, p. 751.

Middle East roughly the equivalent of the former Near East in area, but its successor in time, with the demise of the Ottoman Empire as the dividing line. Some equate Middle East to the Arab world—"the Arabic-speaking Near East," as an American professor in Beirut put it. Others spread the Middle East over a large portion of the Islamic world of some 370,000,000 people, including Morocco on the west and East Pakistan, India and Russian Turkestan on the east, as does the Middle East Institute of Washington. The American Friends of the Middle East have recognized that the Middle East may be "more a psychological than a geographical area." In the words of their executive vice-president, "the Middle East can be defined as comprising those countries between the Pillars of Hercules and the Straits of Macassar in which, if an injustice is perpetrated in one, a protest will be raised in the the others—plus Israel." Psychological overtones appear also in the recent definition of the unifying principle of the Middle East—a principle so elastic as to apply potentially to half the globe—by a prominent sociologist: "The people of the area are today unified not by their common solutions but by their common problems: how to modernize traditional lifeways that no longer 'work' to their own satisfaction." Anthropologists define the Middle East as a culture area extending from Morocco and Timbuktu to Russian Turkestan and West Pakistan.

It looks as if the search for a single criterion of unity, or even a set of criteria, is bound to fail when applied to so heterogeneous an area. For as the term Middle East has developed in history to its present condition, the unifying principle has always been the political and strategic interest of outside powers, especially of Britain. An approach to a new strategic concept of the Middle East in American terms has been made by a professor who puts one foot of his Middle East in Europe: "For the United States, the Middle East ranges from Athens to Tehran and from Ankara to Cairo." But this is unlikely to satisfy other specialists. Recently the geographer of the State Department has concluded that the Middle East cannot be defined.[16]

Given the hopeless disunity among specialists and governments as to where the Middle East is, how can the term be intelligently employed? For it is obvious that the neologism will be with us for some time, and if Near East is no longer accepted, Middle East is the only currently available replacement. Three possibilities exist. One is to recognize the Middle East as shapeless—a territorially indefinable state of mind, like the Middle West in the United States. A second possibility is to admit frankly that there is no particular Middle East, but that there are as many Middle Easts as there are problems touching this fuzzy region in any way. In this case Middle East must on each occasion be redefined. But such agreement on either vagueness or multiplicity is unlikely to clear up the confusion. The most logical possibility for intelligent use of the term is therefore the third—an agreement on arbitrary limits. There is no common denominator to recent definitions of the Middle East; some of them fail to coincide in any portion whatsoever. Nevertheless, a survey of such definitions reveals the most common core to be

[16] G. Etzel Pearcy, "The Middle East—An Indefinable Region," *Department of State Bulletin*, March 23, 1959, p. 407–416; reprinted as Department of State Publication No. 6806, Near East and Middle Eastern Series 39.

Turkey, Iran, Israel, Egypt and the Arab states of Asia. Desirable as such arbitrary agreement might be, it seems unlikely of achievement, for logical objections would demand the inclusion of Afghanistan with Iran, the Sudan with Egypt, Greek Thrace with Turkish Thrace, and so ad infinitum.

The general public can probably struggle along with an imprecise Middle East, provided the imprecision is clearly understood. But can the United States Government? We are now committed by the Eisenhower Doctrine to economic and military aid to nations "in the general area of the Middle East." In view of the three totally different Middle Easts outlined by the State Department in the last two years, and the official geographer's inability to delimit the region, where are we prepared to act? It may be argued in reply that vagueness has a certain advantage in foreign policy. This was Secretary Dulles' first reaction when Congressional committees asked him to define the area. Mr. Dulles felt that drawing a defense perimeter might be an invitation to the Soviet Union to take anything outside that line. Intentional vagueness sometimes has advantage as a tent-like cover for unformulated possibilities of future action or inaction. Furthermore, it may be argued, as in a recent incisive study of American policy in this area, that "the important thing is what we do about the Middle East, not how we define it."[17]

Yet this obvious truth makes it no less important to know where the United States is prepared to do something, and presumably to let other governments know. More often than vagueness, precision is the essential element in diplomacy. Later on in his testimony Secretary Dulles recognized this, when he indicated that he was willing to list by name those countries to which the Eisenhower Doctrine would apply. Senator Morse raised the crucial question as to whether, if Bulgaria went Titoist and were attacked by the U.S.S.R., the Eisenhower Doctrine would apply to Bulgaria. "That is not in the area of the Middle East," said Secretary Dulles.[18] But of course by some definitions Bulgaria is in the Middle East, and Morse went on to point out that this sort of problem was implicit if an amorphous and non-technical regional term were officially used.

In the last analysis, then, a term of convenience like Middle East may on occasion become a term of great inconvenience. Not only is the term amorphous, but it seems to imply gratuitously that the Mediterranean lands have no close relationships with the United States and the West generally, but are Asian in outlook. The only solution, then, to the dilemma of how to use the term officially would be a pledge of total abstinence. Five years ago the government of India decided to give up Middle East as meaningless in relation to its own position. And in that lucid moment in 1947 the British Government's reply to a questioner in Commons had been that, "Where precision would be required, we should not use these terms." Can the State Department, the White House, and Washington generally be induced to take the pledge?

[17] John C. Campbell, "Defense of the Middle East." New York: Harper, 1958, p. x.

[18] *Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations . . . on S. J. Resolution 19,* 85th Congress, 1st Session, p. 275, 278.