EVOLUTION OF THE TERM "GREATER MIDDLE EAST"

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The aim of this article is to illuminate how the term "Greater Middle East" has evolved. This article looks into the first use of the word East and the emergence of the term Middle East and the countries that are within it. In addition, Middle East related terms in general and Greater Middle East in particular have been analyzed. Project "Greater Middle East" has raised contradictory opinions in the Arab and Western world. Even though the term was adopted in 2004, many Arab countries perceived it as an attempt to reconstruct the region by geographical, human, economic, political and military means serving American and Israeli interests. All-the-while American and Israeli policymakers considered it as an opportunity for peace and progress.

Keywords: East; West; Middle East; Middle East Partnership initiative; Greater Middle East.

ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ТЕРМИНА «БОЛЬШОЙ БЛИЖНИЙ ВОСТОК»

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Проанализирована эволюция термина «Большой Ближний Восток» от первого использования слова «восток» до появления понятия «Ближний Восток». Кроме того, рассмотрены связанные с Ближним Востоком термины в целом и термин «Большой Ближний Восток» в частности. Проект «Большой Ближний Восток» вызвал противоречивые мнения в арабском и западном мире. Хотя этот термин начали использовать в 2004 г., многие арабские страны восприняли его как попытку перестроить регион географическими, человеческими, экономическими, политическими и военными средствами для удовлетворения интересов Америки и Израиля. Американские и израильские политики рассматривали его как возможность для мира и прогресса.

Ключевые слова: Восток; Запад; Ближний Восток; ближневосточная партнерская инициатива; Большой Ближний Восток.

The terminology proposed by America at the beginning of the 21st century such as "Greater Middle East" in 2003, "Creative Chaos" in 2005, "New Middle East" in 2006, and by Israel such as "New Middle East" in 1994, has brought about many conflicting opinions. In Arab sources, the vast majority of researchers have criticized these projects because from their perspectives they aim to restructure the system in the Middle East in all its political, economic, social, cultural and educational components to achieve the West's goals in general and Israeli interests in particular. Some Western writers share the Arab point of view. For instance, T. Meyssan clearly points out that the purpose of these projects is to serve the interests of Western nations and Israel [1]. In the same context, N. Chomsky mentions that when the pretext of weapons of mass destruction began to collapse a few months after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US administration raised the tone

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of democracy. Then Americans sped up their plan to rehabilitate what became known as the Greater Middle East [2, p. 60]. In contrast, Sh. Peres, the former Israeli Foreign Minister, said in his book "The New Middle East" that a new way of thinking should be taken to deliver peace and security for the people in the Middle East [3, p. 17]. Moreover, the US administration announced that the aim of the Greater Middle East Project and the Middle East Partnership Initiative is to modernize the region's political systems and societies as well as to contain the evils of radical Islamists [1].

Due to absence of a complete and comprehensive study on this topic, this article is the first in Belarusian historiography to look into its evolution in order to bridge previously existing gaps in modern Middle East studies. Arab, Russian and Western sources have partially addressed this issue. The common denominator for these sources is their lack of in-depth research into the origins of this concept.

Arab authors such as Abdul Qadir al-Mokhademi, As'ad al-Sahmarani, and Ghazi Hussein all agree that this project was adopted in 2003, but their research lacks accurate chronology and contains discrepancies regarding roots of the Middle East. Abdul Qadir al-Mokhademi indicated that the concept of the Middle East was used during World War I [4, p. 36], while Ghazi Hussein referred that the term Middle East dated back to 1897 when T. Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, declared that the Middle East Commonwealth should be established [5, p. 12]. In addition to it, Arab historiography is characterized largely by dogma and the nexus between Middle East related terms and Israel. In accordance with it, all terms are aimed at entering Israel in the region and recognizing it at the expense of the Arab identity. The writers assume that the term "Middle East" does not have geographical significance as much as a political one in its origin and usage. They also affirm that its name was extracted from outside perception to the Arab region. In this regard, former Turkish Foreign Minister A. Davutoglu is on board with this idea referring that the terms "Middle East" and "Near East" do not have any objective meaning for people in China and India, as those are regions to the West of them [6, p. 156].

With respect to Russian sources, there is a difference in determining the Greater Middle East project history. In Z. S. Syzdykova article it is said that the term "Greater Middle East" appeared after the events of 11 September [7], at the same time D. A. Belashchenko, I. D. Komarov point out it emerged after Russian troops invaded Afghanistan in 1979 [8].

With regard to Western sources, even though there is absence of tracing the roots of the term Greater Middle East, some sources handled the emergence of the other term "Middle East" quite profoundly. "The Great Game" by H. Lawrence is a valuable book that describes the first roots of the word East and the first using of the term "Middle East" [9]. Based on that, this article will illuminate how the term "Greater Middle East" has evolved.

Throughout history, the East has been the scene of conventional battles for its designation and a battleground between major powers rivaling for its control. It should also be noted that there is no documented evidence of the first application of the word "East", but according to H. Lawrence, the first use of this term dates back to the Roman era, which began to expand towards East and West. However, this word changed its meaning multiple times over successive historical periods. Since the 15th century, it has become the Islamic Realm [9, p. 9]. In this regard, A. Davutoglu asserts that theorists and makers of Western policies derived these terms by themselves. He added that the geographical integration of the region after the control of Islamic civilization on all its sectors led to cultural integration. From that time till the present day the Middle East has been considered an arena to control the Islamic civilization. In addition, the concept of the Middle East changed according to the variables to which the arena of control had been subjected to, whether towards expansion or decline [6, p. 158].

However, in the 15th century with the discovery of India and the influx of Europeans to China in the 16th–17th century, the French monarchy used the word "Levant", as a synonym for the word of l'Orient, to denote the Mediterranean shores of the Ottoman Empire, while in its originality l'Orient referred to the Indian Ocean's realm. In addition, England expressed the same distinction through the Levant Company founded in 1592 and the East India Company formed in 1600 [9, p. 9].

H. Lawrence indicates that by the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, those words changed in such a way that the Orient began to mean Ottoman territory specifically, i. e. the Levant closest to Europe [9, p. 10]. For example, the forces of Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign against Egypt in 1798 bore the name of the Orient Army [10].

At the end of the 19th century, against the backdrop of signs of weakness in China, a new term "Far East" was applied. In the 1890s, this necessitated the need to find the expression "Near East" to indicate a specific geographical area of the Eastern question. It was well known at the time that the Eastern question referred to the presence of Ottoman Muslims in the Balkans [9, p. 10]. This linguistic renewal pointed to a vacuum between Far East and Near East.

It is noteworthy that the term "Middle East" may have dated back to the 1850s in the British India office, which was a British government department established in London in 1858 to oversee the administration of the provinces of British India through a Viceroy and other officials [11]. Because of the widespread involvement in external relations and the defense policy of pre-1947 African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries, the India office was also responsible for particular neighboring or connected areas at different times,

such as the Red Sea, Arabian Peninsula, Persian Gulf states, Iraq and Iran [11].

But despite the emergence of the term Middle East at that time, its first usage went back to 1902 when the aforementioned void was filled by the geopolitical scientist and US naval officer A. Hamman in the article regarding the Persian Gulf and international relations. A. Haman used the term "Middle East" for the first time in his talk about German plans to build a railway from Berlin to Baghdad (while the Middle East seemed to stretch from the Persian Gulf to the British Empire in India). Later, a series of articles on the Middle East question by V. Shirol, a foreign affairs correspondent for "The Times" followed [9, p. 10].

Abdul Quadir al-Mokhademi considers that the use of the term "Middle East" by the colonial countries of Britain and France dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. The purpose was to confront the Arab nationalist tide and to prevent the realization of the Arab unity project the pioneers of which were Boutros Bustani, Gergi Zidan, Najib Azoury and others. They articulated the idea of creating one Arab nation and a need for their independence from Turkey, especially in 1908 following the imposition of the Turkish national movement, led by the "Young Turks", a policy of Turkism on Arab societies. The author adds, after the demise of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, British and French spheres of influence emerged through agreements and treaties between them to divide Turkish territory in the Arab world, such as the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916 [4, p. 43].

Following World War I, the term "Middle East" gained momentum, W. Churchill, the British colonial secretary, established the Royal Middle East Administration (1921). It was entrusted with Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. The Middle East Command was set up in Egypt, Sudan and Kenya with administrative rather than operational responsibilities in Palestine. Moreover, with the discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula in the 1930s the Middle East in British politics and the Orient in the literature of French policy has become popular [4, p. 36].

By the end of World War II, the term Middle East was used to include the countries from Western Egypt to Eastern Iran. However, the geographic boundaries of the Middle East and its countries differed according to the government that used the term. As for America, after 1945 the US entered the Middle East theater and adopted an active policy in the region. The Middle East Institute was established in Washington, which issued the newspaper called "Middle East". The institute defined the boundaries of the Middle East in such a way that it conformed to the Islamic world, from Morocco to Indonesia and from Sudan to Uzbekistan. Whilst the British Royal Institute of International Relations identified the borders of the Middle East which included Iran, Turkey, the Arabian Peninsula, the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, Sudan and Cyprus [12, p. 225].

With the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Middle East became linked with the relationship of those Arab nations with Israel. As a result, the term "Middle East" acquired a new form, a relationship that brings Arabs together with Israel [4, p. 45]. Tel-Aviv also has its own definition of the Middle East, which refers to the surrounding areas and neighboring countries of strategic interest, such as Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia [12, p. 225].

The writer Nazim al-Gassour considers that ever since the second half of the 20th century the Arab region has turned into an open conflict arena with military, security and economic alliances in a way that meets the strategic interests of the major powers, especially the United States of America, which embraced ideas aimed at besieging and containing the region, as well as making Israel a safe state. In 1950, Britain and the United States advanced the idea of defending the Middle East to curb the communist tide in the region [12, p. 226].

The researcher Abdul Quadir al-Mokhademi saw that the geographical scope of the Middle East did not cover a specific region, but it altered in line with the plans and interests of the major powers in the region. With a goal to blockading the Arab nationalist tide led by Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, Britain, France and then the United States created a series of alliances, such as the Baghdad Pact of 1955, the project of former US President D. Eisenhower, and the Islamic Alliance in 1965 [4, p. 45].

Abdul Quadir al-Mokhademi adds that these alliances included Arab countries ruled by conservative regimes loyal to the United States such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq during the rule of Nuri al-Said. Some Arab countries while being at the heart of the same geographical region, such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, were removed from that same Middle East from 1958 [4, p. 45].

Following the 1967 war between Arabs and Israelis, through the UN Security Council Resolution 242 on 22 November 1967, the concept of the Middle East was confined to Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Syria, i. e. the countries that participated in the third Arab-Israeli war [4, p. 47].

Yet B. Lewis in his article titled "The shaping of the modern Middle East" mentions that both terms, "Middle East" and "Near East" but in particular the first of them, have won universal acceptance and are now used to designate this region even by Russians, Africans, Indians, and by the people of the Middle East themselves [13].

In 1991 after the Iraq war and Madrid peace conference, the United States had all the perquisites to impose its economic, cultural and military dominance on the world. G. Hussain deems that with the announcement of G. Bush the birth of a new world order, Washington was seeking to rearrange the situation in the region and introduce Israel into the new regional system after undermining all the foundations of the Arab regional system represented by the Arab League [5, p. 31].

In contrast, Sh. Peres, in his book "The New Middle East", outlined the new system and envisioned that economic unity would be achieved between the Arab region and Israel. This economic unit would combine the Israel's strength in leadership, cheap Arab labor used in manufacturing, combined with the accumulated Arab wealth from the sale of petroleum. Sh. Peres considered that his proposal was a new way of thinking in order to produce security and stability, which required everyone to set up a security system, extensive common regional arrangements and political alliances, which would include all the countries of the region. He stressed that the wars would not bring peace and security to the region. He called for forgetting the past, putting an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, build a new Middle East and a shared Middle Eastern market [3, p. 17].

With an intent to consolidate the bases of the new project, economic summits in Middle East and North Africa were organized. The first conference was held in Casablanca in 1994, in Amman in 1995, in Cairo in 1996 and the last in Doha in 1997 [4, p. 47]. It is worth mentioning that the term "MENA Countries" is commonly used in academic, military and political literature [14].

Undoubtedly, the reaction of the majority of the Arabs to those ideas relating to the Middle East in general and Sh. Peres' project in particular was negative and unacceptable as they were directed against the Arab world with a final objective to eliminate the Arab nation.

In this regard, President Hafez al-Assad expressed the nature of the new project in question, declaring: the Middle East is not only an economic issue, but also a political one. Its intended goal was to cross out Arabism, Arab feelings and national identity. The proposed system is aimed at breaking the will of the Arab nations, tearing them apart, occupying some of them, extorting others to impose an Israeli solution that would establish a "Greater Israel" from the Nile to the Euphrates, reconstructing the region in geographical, human, economic, political and military means serving American and Zionist interests [15, p. 67].

The writer Abdul Quadir al-Mokhademi considers that pushing the new Middle East project aims to:

• restructure the Arab regional system to ensure that Israel enters the new system so that its regional isolation will be broken;

• annul the national identity of the regional system;

• provide vital space for the Israeli economy by opening the Arab market to Israeli exports and creating bonds with economic resources in Arab countries through joint projects that would guarantee the growth of the Israeli economy [4, p. 31].

Following the events of 11 September, from the point of view of Arab writers, the circles of the American far right took advantage of these attacks. The Bush administration used its arguments to justify the aggression against Iraq and accusing Saddam Hussein of being an accomplice of Osama bin Laden and possessing weapons of mass destruction. In addition, it regarded the Middle East as a region of great turmoil in the world and a source of problems that threatened the world and US national security. These problems are terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, fundamentalism, extremism and illegal immigration [4, p. 49].

While America was preparing to topple Saddam Hussein, it promised to turn Iraq into a role model for democracy in the Middle East. This was manifested in December 2002 when C. Powell announced the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) with a view to creating long-term prospects for reform [16]. In the same year, E. Cheney was appointed deputy assistant Secretary of State for Middle East affairs and she was delegated to oversee the MEPI [16].

The MEPI, which paves the way for the Greater Middle East project extending from the Western Sahara to the Balinese province of Pakistan, is based on economic objectives to improve quality, encourage investment and facilitate creation of institutions. In addition, it focused on political objectives that promote civil society, strengthen the rule of law, media pluralism, educational objectives that provide education for everyone including women, to improve school programs, and prepare the human resources for trade and market functions as well [16].

US President George W. Bush said in a speech at the University of South Carolina in May 2003: "The Arab world has great cultural heritage but lacks economic development" [17]. Also, the President announced the desire to establish a free trade zone within ten years, so that it would allow the Middle East nations to be in the circle of growing opportunities that would plant hope in the hearts of the people of those countries [17].

Many Arab researchers stress that the ideology of the Greater Middle East is attributed to the British historian B. Lewis in an article published in the 1994 in journal entitled "Restructuring the Near East". In that article B. Lewis expanded the borders of the Middle East and mentioned that "so useful has the term been found to be that the area of its application, has been vastly extended from the original coastlands of the Persian Gulf to a broad region stretching from the Black Sea to equatorial Africa and from the northwest frontier of India to the Atlantic" [13].

On 6 November 2003 to give impetus to the project, G. Bush delivered a speech at the National Committee for Democracy, placing emphasis on the need to spread democracy in the Arab world for reform. To advance this project, funds were allocated to the establishment of regional offices for America to support reforms in all fields, such as in 2003, 129 million US dollars was allocated and later 100 million US dollars in 2004 [18].

Following G. Bush's speech regarding the need for reform in the Arab world, US Vice President D. Cheney talked about the Middle East reform project at the

Davos Forum in February 2004. The contents of the project, which were based on the 2002–2003 Arab Human Development Reports of the United Nations, identified the major shortcomings Arab countries suffered from. He considered that absence of freedom, knowledge and empowerment of women the predominant reasons for breeding extremism and terrorism [19; 20].

After the spread of the American project, the Arab response was varied. In light of that, two trends emerged in the Arab world. The first one included Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Syria, which rejected it and stated that they would not allow any country to interfere in the affairs of the region. These states viewed that the US project ignored some points of the Human Development Reports, namely that the Arab-Israeli conflict and the existence of Israel is an obstacle and the main reason for failure of most reform and development efforts. The US initiative provided that reconciliation with Israel and establishing normal relations with it is within the framework of the so-called Greater Middle East Project would lead to reform in the Middle East [5, p. 115].

As far as the second trend is concerned, some other Arab countries, including the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar, have called on to look carefully at this initiative and read it in depth to find out its benefits before turning it down [5, p. 115].

In terms of European countries, France criticized the US initiative for not recognizing the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, ignoring the peculiarities and differences between the nations of the region and for not coordinating with the Arab governments [5, p. 118].

It is worth mentioning, both Americans and Europeans agree that the region is the source of a myriad of problems and threats, such as terrorism, drugs, illegal immigration and weapons of mass destruction, but they disagree on ways of approach and priorities.

Based on the EU's insight on the future and positive development of the region on 7 March 2004 France and Germany launched a reform project, complementing the American project, focusing on dialogue and consultation with governments and civil society organizations, taking into account the national feelings, identity and specificities of each country. In addition, it declared that the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for European countries with emphasis that conflicts should not be an obstacle to reform [5, p. 120].

In June 2004, the G8 Summit opened in the US state of Georgia, during which the text of the Middle East Project was presented as a vision for the future of the region.

The Greater Middle East Project proposed by Washington at the G8 Summit in Virginia consisted of a prelude and three titles. It included statistics on the current Arab reality, the most important of which are:
• total GDP of all Arab League countries is lower than that of Spain;

• 40 % of Arabs are illiterate and women make up one third of this number;
• the region is expected to have around 25 million unemployed by 2010;
• a third of Arabs live on less than 2 US dollars a day;
• 1.6 % of the population use the Internet, only 3.5 % of the Arab parliamentary seats are held by women;
• 15 % of young people expressed their desire to emigrate;
• the total number of books produced by Arabs is 1.1 % of the total world production, while religious books constitute 15 % [21].

Having mentioned the shortcomings in the 2002–2003 UN Human Development Reports three objectives were introduced to cope with these issues. The first one was to promote democracy and its main points were the poor state of the Arab countries in the political arena, fighting against corruption, promotion of freedom and transparency, establishment of institutions to train women to participate in political and civic life and advancement of internal reform through civil society organizations, including Human rights non-governmental organizations.

The second demanded the establishment of a knowledgeable society. According to that, building such a society is grounded on three initiatives: basic education, online education and business education.

The third title was to expand economic opportunities by strengthening the private sector, establishing the Middle East Development Bank and encouraging the Arab countries to join the WTO [21].

At the end of the summit, after some amendments made by the European countries, it was established that the likes of reform must be carried out from within and cannot be imposed from the outside. It also emphasized the need to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and other regional conflicts, the US project on reforming the Middle East under the title "Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Broader Middle East and North Africa" was also adopted.

Considering the evolution of the term Greater Middle East, we can sum up the following:

1. The geostrategic importance of the Middle East, as well as its natural resources, has been the focal point of the major powers in the world.

2. There is no uniform definition of the geography of the Middle East and the countries that are within it as they have been constantly changing in accordance with political criteria and outside perception of the region.

3. Most Arab researchers agree that all terms related to the Middle East, such as the New Middle East and the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which paves the way for the Greater Middle East, aim to eliminate the current Arab identity and insert non-Arab nations such as Israel into the region, all-the-while American and Israeli policymakers perceived it as an opportunity for peace and progress.

4. The Greater Middle East Project became the basis for the two Arab Human Development Reports issued in 2002–2003, which shed light on the shortcomings the Arab countries suffered from and considered that these deficiencies are responsible for the problems of the region and its backwardness.

5. Despite the opposition from most Arab countries to the Greater Middle East Project, it was nevertheless adopted in 2004 under the name of "Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Broader Middle East and North Africa" after some amendments were made by European countries to mitigate the Arab stance on this project.

In conclusion, evolution of the term Greater Middle East has gone through several stages starting from the first use of the word East to the date when the United States of America adopted it as a solution to the problems of the Middle Eastern countries. One cannot disagree with the United Nations reports of 2002 and 2003 that highlighted the main issues and the inherent lack of progress in the region with an exception of Israel, but I would dispute the honest intent of the United States in bringing peace and development to the region. The goal of the US has never been and will never be to create a prosperous and united Middle East. To prove this we should look at the type of investments the United States and Europe have brought to the region, only hotels and entertainment industries have been their main investments, while Israel, aside from its 3.2 billion US dollars in annual cash infusion, receives a large chunk of technological and industrial relocations of the US and European corporations. Not to mention US support for authoritarian regimes in the Arab world and its dual policy in dealing with regional conflicts between the countries of the region. Besides, from the point of view of Arab thinkers Israel has been a challenge for the Arab world. They also affirm that all projects proposed either by America or Israel are in favor of both countries. However, the author of this article maintains that it would be absurd to hold USA and Israel responsible for all what has been going on in this region in question.

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