Lecturer General Sir John Bagot Glubb Telescopes Middle East

By Cy Todd

Recognized to be the world’s foremost expert on the Middle East, General Sir John Bagot Glubb was lecturer in Tuesday night’s LSC program in Rouge Auditorium.

The General chose to divide his talk into three parts: the importance of the Middle East, its history, and the Middle East situation today. Beginning with the importance of the Middle East as part of a vital trade route between East and West, General Glubb stressed the geographical position of Britain, a small, overpopulated, poorly situated island. Slave trade in the only means of her sustenance, the Middle East is a serious matter to the British.

Also brought up under this first topic was the historically important position of the Middle East. General Glubb stated that if the British could effectively control the Middle East, it could easily dominate the world in two ways, by support or control from the West to the East by simply blocking the trade routes.

Today, the vast oil fields of Arabia are vitally important to the West. Again, any power in control of the Middle East need only cut off access to this oil to paralyze the West. General Glubb recalled that a small force of British soldiers in Egypt during 1941 fought the Germans and Italians in North Africa, Greece, Afganistan, and Jordan and made contact with the Russians in Iraq.

Later, the British recognized they had to be friendly with the ruling power to move cargoes through the Suez Canal. Until 1915, this concern, he said, the Turks in the Middle East was part of the Ottoman Empire. When the Turks allied with the Germans in WWI the British negotiated with the Arabs outside Turkey to derive the Turks out and settle the Middle East as one great Arab state.

Although an agreement was reached and the Turks drove out, it was only until WWII that the Arab reached any degree of independence and then only in as many states. On top of this, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 concerning the establishment of Palestine was carried out by the British and led to the final statehood of Israel in 1948. All this convinced the Arabs that the British were betrayed. They believed the British were set out to deserve all this for some ulterior motive when actually, the General added, all had only made a “fruitful middle of the whole business.”

The General concluded the lecture with a summary evaluation of recent events. This included Nasser’s rise to power, Egypt’s agreements with Stalin to receive arms, and revolts in the northern Arab states.

Signifying new developments, the General observed, was the replacement of the older people in office, such as in his own situation, with a younger man of about forty. The General feels this is symptomatic of the younger European-educated people resulting against the older people of classic Middle Eastern-jen. Certainly there is a larger number of educated people in these countries today, people that have been exposed to the Western culture and want to emulate it.

In this revolution of the young people of the Middle East, General Glubb feels fault with the foreign policies of the United States. The General feels these countries are too ready to make agreements with the existing governments and do not consider the future. He presented the question with respect to these governments and agreements.

As for outside influences on the Middle East, the General feels especially significant the ability of one government to appeal to the mass of another government’s people today’s modern means of communication. This pressure has allowed Russia to obtain a foothold in the Middle East and, consequently, cause immense damage between the Middle East and the West.

The General had several suggestions to gain the favor of the Middle Eastern powers or help powerful relations at least. Firstly, the General states that a breath of common understanding toward the Arabs would earn their unending loyalty for they are a proud people. Secondly, the US should avoid “playing favorites” among the Arab countries for more than once we have been accused of setting one country against another. Thirdly, we should not disregard the nationalism spirit in any of these countries. To do so would be highly impractical for we have been accused in nationalism ourselves.

Lastly, we should try to produce a desire and a more worthwhile picture of the future between ourselves and the Arabs. Thus, the General finished, could enable us to join together in a really worthy cause.

General Glubb served in the British Army for 13 years. Then, in 1940, he resigned his commission to become an administrative inspector for the Iraqi government. From 1949 to 1956, he served as the commander in chief of the Arab Legion. He retired in 1960 and was knighted by the Queen of England for his services.