

Essay and Discussion Questions

Middle East & North Africa Higher Education Questions

Help students understand the Middle East and North Africa through these essay and discussion questions.

Question 1

The Middle East and North Africa are home to an extraordinary number of heritage sites within the Abrahamic religions (i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). How does this shared heritage fuel both conflict and cooperation across the region?

Question 2

Describe the impact oil has had on political and economic development in the Middle East. How, for example, has oil fostered the rise of Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Persian Gulf? Alternatively, how has regional and international competition over oil fostered instability in the region?

Question 3

Explain, in your own words, the underlying causes of tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia. How have these tensions contributed to conditions of instability across the Middle East and North Africa?

Question 4

The Middle East and North Africa have long been shaped by foreign influence. Incorporating examples from across the twentieth century, explain how international and regional competition has defined the history of this region. Answers should include mention of colonialism, the Cold War, and contemporary foreign interventions.

Question 5

How have countries within and outside of the Middle East and North Africa used soft power (or non-coercive) diplomacy to strengthen their influence in the region? Using specific examples from the resources, evaluate the effectiveness of this diplomatic approach.

Question 6

Explain, in your own words, the Arab uprisings of the early 2010s. What were populations across North Africa and the Middle East protesting? What results did these populations hope to attain?

Question 7

Evaluate the social and political aftermath of the 2010s Arab uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East. Which countries moved towards democratic transition after the uprisings, and which countries maintained authoritarianism? What factors explain this divergence in political trajectory?

Question 8

What are the roots of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Alternatively, how did the 1947 UN Partition Plan

lay the groundwork for long-term conflict in the region?

- How have foreign powers (including the United States) sought to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians? How successful have peace settlements and discussions been? Using specific historical details to support your answer, do you think a peaceful settlement between Israel and the Palestinians is possible? Why or why not?

Question 9

Evaluate the effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. How has the United States historically involved itself in the region, and why? Supporting your answer with specific examples, do you think the United States should continue to involve itself in the Middle East? Why or why not?

Question 10

The Middle East and North Africa have experienced significant social, economic, and cultural change over the past twenty years; however, the region has also experienced significant instability and controversy. Using specific examples from the reading, explain the social, economic, or cultural improvement in this region that you would deem most significant. Next, explain an ongoing challenge that you would deem most critical for the region to address.

- Alternatively, select one contemporary humanitarian crisis in the Middle East or North Africa. Write a policy memo to the President of the United States that explains the crisis and details the extent to which the United States should respond. Be sure to support your memo with factual explanations and a detailed policy outline.