

ENVS/HIST/PS 295Q Sustainability and Collapse in the Middle East Final Project Prompts

For the final project in this course, students registered at the 295 level will work in groups to analyze a real-world “wicked problem” from the region. Examples are drawn from varying geographic locations and different policy areas. The common denominator is their complex, multi-dimensional nature, which requires analysis from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Considering the political, economic, environmental, cultural and/or historical implications of the problems in question, your task is to highlight these competing concerns and attempt to reach a compromise in the form of a concrete policy response.

1. Should the new structure at Petra be excavated?

Using satellite imagery and aerial drone photography, archaeologists have discovered what they believe to be a [massive public monument and ceremonial platform](#) close to the center of the ancient city. Should the site be excavated and/or reconstructed to promote tourism and economic development? Or should the site be preserved to prevent damage and further ecological stresses to the area?

2. How should the Jordanian government respond to the Syrian refugee crisis?

Jordan is currently host to [more than 650,000 Syrian refugees](#). Despite the government’s insistence that such a humanitarian response is Jordan’s moral obligation, the policy puts increased pressure on a struggling economic system and creates increased demand for already scarce resources like water. Recently, the Jordanian government has significantly restricted border crossings, leading to a [large backlog of refugees on “the berm”](#) (border area) between Jordan and Syria where conditions are harsh. How should the Jordanian government proceed?

3. How should Saudi Arabia approach the issue of food security?

For many years, Saudi Arabia has promoted a policy of [farming the desert](#)--growing water intensive crops like wheat and alfalfa in extremely arid lands. The policy was justified in the name of economic development and food security, but many have questioned both the wisdom and the sustainability of such practices. Recently, the Saudi government adopted a policy to [phase out all wheat production by 2016](#). What should the government’s policy be in the future, and how will that policy impact the political, economic and environmental security of the Saudi people?

4. How should Turkish officials address growing infrastructure needs in the ancient city of Istanbul?

More than 10 years ago, the Turkish government began work on a series of major infrastructure projects--including the Marmaray rail tunnel and the Eurasia road tunnel--to improve transportation links across the Bosphorus strait and reduce Istanbul’s infamous traffic congestion. Since then, the projects have encountered numerous setbacks, including the [discovery of an ancient port](#) that delayed work on the Marmaray tunnel and raised concerns about what else may

be damaged or buried beneath the construction sites. Further, critics have questioned whether the tunnels [will actually reduce traffic](#) and raised [safety concerns](#) about building underwater tunnels on a [seismic hotspot](#). How should policymakers balance these competing concerns?

5. What should be done about the illicit trade in antiquities from the Middle East?

With the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), terrible loss of life and insecurity has been accompanied by threats to some of the region's most precious cultural heritage sites. We have witnessed the dramatic [destruction of irreplaceable historical monuments](#), as well as the [unregulated excavation of protected archeological sites](#)-- ostensibly for illegal sale on the international antiquities market. The situation threatens not only our ability to preserve and understand the past, but the future cultural and economic prospects of the region. What, if anything, should be done to address the destruction and illegal sale of antiquities?

