The Modern Middle East SP 11: choose one question in each section.

Section I

1. The traditional meta-narrative of Middle Eastern history posits the period from the end of the sixteenth century into the nineteenth century as one of “decline,” followed by a period of “reform” and/or modernization. Discuss the origins and evolution of that narrative, the critical responses to it, and alternative visions.

2. Late 19th century Islamic modernism is often presented as a “response” to “the Western impact” but there is also an alternative interpretation that emphasizes the “indigenous roots” of Islamic reformism in the Islamicate world of the 18th century. Clarify the events, people, ideas, and/or movements being referred to, and explain the main interpretational arguments and what is at stake.

Section II

1. Is it possible at this point to construct a “history of women in the Middle East” in the 19th and 20th centuries? What changes should be highlighted and how would they be explained? How did colonial and national state policies, and religious and political movements, affect women’s situation?

2. An enduring concern in historical and social science scholarship on the Middle East has been the role of religion and religious leaders in politics and society. Explain how those roles changed during the 19th and 20th centuries in the Ottoman Empire (including Egypt) and its successor states, plus Iran. What factors account for different outcomes in different states/societies?

Section III

1. Outline an encyclopedia essay or a lecture series on the histories of Islamism and the various nationalisms with which it has co-existed in diverse countries. What are the main themes and sub-themes you would use to organize your discussion, and what interpretational emphases would work best?

2. Historians of the modern Middle East are fond of dividing the twentieth century into two halves, with the decade following the end of World War II as marking the transition between the two. Is this valid? If so, explain what events and factors – political, social, and so on – that would justify treating the past sixty years as a distinct period. If not, make the contrary case.