

2026 Bill Taylor Essay Contest

Rationale: This year’s Camden Conference topic is “Today’s Middle East: Power, Politics, Players,” which seeks to define a region of tremendous cultural, linguistic, religious, political, and economic diversity. The West’s relationship with the Middle East and its individual countries, nations, and ways of life defies simple terms, yet articulating and understanding that relationship is critical for global prosperity and global security. Thus, your task will be to articulate a policy platform that ought to drive the United States’ and/or the West’s decisions and actions in the region moving forward.

Prompt:

1. Identify whether your policy platform for Middle Eastern issues would be philosophically rooted in multilateralism, bilateralism, or unilateralism and why.
 - a. Provide current or historical justification for this position.
2. Explain whether your policy platform for Middle Eastern issues is predicated on direct intervention (i.e.—“hard power”), indirect intervention (i.e.—“soft power”), or nonintervention (i.e.—“disengagement”).
3. Propose a solution to one of the current regional issues identified in your coursework or by the Camden Conference panelists using your policy platform.

Ex.—Reconstruction of Syria following the Assad regime; Reconstruction of Gaza following the Israel-Hamas War; Addressing persecution of ethnic and religious minorities on the Arabian peninsula; The promotion of women’s rights in theocratic nations; Addressing water security and environmental degradation in the Levant; The promotion of free and open elections in North Africa; et cetera.

The questions below might serve as reference points in crafting your solution.

- i. What are the social, political, and religious heritages present in the region today?
- ii. How have commodities such as fossil fuels and the factors of production influenced the Middle East’s geopolitics?
- iii. Are the perspective and orientation of the West merely compatible with or complementary to the Near and Middle East?
- iv. How will a changing climate alter the human and physical geography of the region in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term?
- v. How do the contemporary conflicts in the Middle East interact with one another and the United States?

4. Plan and compose a formal essay detailing your policy platform, the policy issue and recommendation(s), the lines of reasoning, and further implications for the global community.
5. Finalize and submit the essay to be reviewed prior to the dates listed below.

Recommended Page Length: 4-6 pages, typed and double-spaced. MLA or APA citations required.

Date for submission to the Bill Taylor Contest -- TBD