

September 2011

Comprehensive Examination: International Relations

Major Field Exam: Answer FOUR questions; you have EIGHT hours to do so.

Minor Field Exam: Answer THREE questions; you have SIX hours to do so.

All answers will be given equal weight. Be sure to refer to the relevant literature in your answers and watch the time.

1) Many realist approaches to international politics assume that the international system is a self-help system. What explanatory power does this assumption have for great powers? One could argue, on the one hand, that in a multipolar system, self-help is impossible: states are unable to rely on their own resources in order to survive because the sum weight of other powers is greater than their own. On the other hand, one could argue that in a unipolar system, self-help is not necessary. A unipolar power needs no help from lesser powers to assure its security, and lesser powers cannot rely on other minor powers to protect them from the unipolar power. Respond to these arguments and address the logic of self-help more generally, explaining what role the assumption of self-help plays and why.

2) In many traditional approaches to International Relations, a theory or paradigm (in part) highlights a type of agent and makes assumptions about its preferences (e.g., states are the key actors in international politics, and they pursue security). In new research about international institutions and global governance, non-state actors are often highlighted. Does research on non-state actors have a theory of their preferences or interests? If so, is there a single theory of preferences that takes into account a variety of non-state actors, or are there different theories for different types of actors? And, is highlighting a new type of actors without providing an accompanying, parsimonious theory of preferences sufficient to provide direction to research?

3) How well does the field of international political economy address the rise of new state actors (e.g. China, Brazil, and India), non-state actors (e.g. NGOs and multinational corporations), and new forms of technological development (e.g. internet and social media)? Discuss the strengths and weakness of IPE theory in addressing the role of these evolving actors and technologies in the world economy.

4) The previous era of globalization ended with the Great Depression. Does the 2008 global financial crisis similarly represent a watershed moment for globalization? Will the crisis just be a bump in the road or will it ultimately mean a major disruption of the post-WWII economic interdependence? According to the IPE literature, what are the major strengths and weakness of the current international economic regime? What are some potential fissures in the global economic architecture moving forward?

5) What are the advantages and disadvantages of the focus on the United States in the literature on foreign policy decision-making? On balance, is this focus useful or dangerous? How might more comparative work on non-American cases enrich our theories of foreign policy decision-making?

6) For over a decade, political science discussions have emphasized formal rationalist accounts of war. However, we know much more about war than is captured by these arguments. First, summarize the key insights offered by the formal rational choice arguments. Then discuss other important theories about the causes of different types of interstate war. Finally, if you like, identify some connections between the formal and other literatures.

7) There is growing public concern about China's rise and a somewhat parallel debate within the international relations community about the dangers of China's rise. Explain this China debate in terms of different IR theories and/or different assessments of the international environment currently facing China and the United States.