

## **Comprehensive Examination: International Relations**

The George Washington University

Department of Political Science

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### **Instructions**

Please answer one question from each section. You have eight hours to complete the exam.

Keep the following in mind when composing your essays. First, read the questions carefully and answer all parts of the questions you select. Second, articulate a coherent argument in answering each question. Merely demonstrating that you have read the literature is insufficient for answering questions satisfactorily. To this end, it is strongly recommended that you outline your essays before beginning to write. Third, although citation format is up to you, author-date citations (e.g., “Waltz 1979”) are recommended for speed and brevity. Rough or approximate citations to prominent works (e.g., “Rodrik’s 2011 book on globalization”) are acceptable. There is no need to provide a bibliography or list of references.

### **Section I: IR Theory**

1. IR scholars spent many years thinking about the concept of “hegemony” and theorizing its implications for international order and state policy. More recently, IR scholars have been interested in the concept of “hierarchy” and its implications. Compare and contrast these two concepts. What are the strengths of each as an analytic tool? What are the weaknesses of each? Should we prefer one to the other and if so why? How should we use these ideas productively in our thinking about world politics?
2. In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, states increased their cooperation with each other to combat the global terrorism threat. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the international system saw limited cooperation to combat the global health threat. Why did the global responses to these two shocks diverge so radically? What can IR theory explain (or not explain) about these different patterns of cooperation?
3. Black Lives Matter has roiled the discipline of international relations, leading to broad introspection about why the discipline has ignored race for so long. Moving forward, what are some particularly promising ways of “integrating” race into the study of international relations? How might attention to race challenge and change some core theoretical constructs in the field? If there are potential intellectual pitfalls in this “integration” process, be sure to discuss those as well.
4. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many IR scholars were writing about world politics as a “unipolar” system and policy makers were talking about U.S. “primacy.” Such talk has largely disappeared. The United States has failed to win two wars since 2000 (in Iraq and Afghanistan). It has seen its neoliberal economic agenda challenged by states in the global south and by China, among others, and its premier global trade institution, the WTO, is on life-support. What IR theories might help us explain why even the strongest states often fail to get what they want? If multiple IR theories speak to this question, do those theories agree? If they disagree, explain what those disagreements are. Are some of these theories more persuasive than others? If so, explain why.

### **Section II: International Security**

1. In the literatures on nuclear weapons and terrorism, respectively, there are long-standing debates about how effective these tools are for compellence. For example, prominent voices in both literatures argue that neither nuclear threats nor terrorism is useful for obtaining compliance with compellers’ demands. Discuss the main arguments within these debates and highlight some of the prominent findings. In your view, what are the most persuasive arguments in this debate and why? Is compellence equally likely (or unlikely) to succeed in both of these areas? Are there conditions under which compellence is likely to elicit compliance? If so, what are they? Be sure to define compellence as part of your answer.

2. One of the major debates about globalization concerns its effects on income inequality, both between and within states. Inequality, however—other than disparities in material power among states—has been relatively neglected in the study of security. Discuss two or three areas in which inequalities of various types (e.g., racial or ethnic, gender, political, economic) have been used to explain various outcomes in security studies. Assess the impact or persuasiveness of these contributions to the literature.
3. Selection bias has been said to affect a wide range of important research findings in international security. In your essay, first explain some of the forms that selection bias can take, how it can undermine empirical findings, and different methods that analysts can use to correct for bias. Second, explore studies in two or three different subject areas in security studies that are potentially affected by selection bias. Discuss how the authors of those studies did or did not try to deal with its effects on their findings and assess how persuasive or effective those attempts were. Based on your evaluation, explain what you think are best practices (if any) for dealing with selection bias and why they are effective. Be sure to define key terms, including selection bias, in your answer.
4. There is little doubt that the frequency and intensity of interstate war have declined since the cataclysm of World War II. Similarly, states very rarely disappear anymore. Some scholars attribute these trends to a powerful norm against conquest that is enshrined in the UN Charter. Skeptics, however, argue that interstate aggression, violence, and intervention have not disappeared but have merely changed form. Discuss two or three guises in which interstate conflict continues to appear in the post-World War II era. Do these phenomena undermine a norm against conquest? Why or why not? Or does such a norm exist at all? If not, what is a better explanation for these trends? Be sure to define your terms clearly in your answer.

### **Section III: International Political Economy**

1. Classical models of international trade, including Heckscher-Ohlin and Stolper-Samuelson, suggest that global economic integration exacerbates wealth inequality within rich countries, while reducing such income gaps in poor countries. Do these models explain the politics of world trade today? Why or why not? Please provide several examples to illustrate your answer.
2. The economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic has renewed concerns about the sustainability of the dollar as the leading reserve currency. Some experts fear that the U.S. government's massive stimulus spending, expanding national debt, and lack of a medium-term fiscal sustainability plan could lead to a crisis of confidence in the dollar. Some thinkers have thus proposed using the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) – an internal IMF currency that can be exchanged for hard currency reserves – as a global reserve currency. From an international political economy perspective, what are the costs and benefits of such a global currency? What does political economy theory tell us about the compatibility of such currency regimes with domestic policy autonomy? Does the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century gold standard offer any relevant historical lessons? Why or why not?
3. As part of the United States-Mexico-Canada Trade (USMCA) deal, Mexico has promised to pass laws that will guarantee workers the right to form unions, negotiate their own labor contracts, and earn three times the minimum wage in the auto-parts sector. Is there a compelling need for such national regulation? Evaluate the competing claims of the two major IPE schools of thought about global investment and national governance: policy convergence and policy divergence. What pattern do you think exemplifies such regional integration today? Is the “race to the bottom” an important policy concern, or is it merely a myth? Provide empirical examples in your answer.
4. Why hasn't the Biden administration—a known supporter of multilateralism—called off the U.S. trade war with China, an impasse that has left the World Trade Organization (WTO) unable to function as a global arbiter of trade disputes? What do political economy models of trade tell us about the political coalitions supporting such protection? What institutional factors help explain why these interest groups are able to exert such influence over U.S. trade policy? Similarly, what does political economy theory suggest about the Biden administration's ability to shift trade negotiations back to multilateral forums?