

# **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 (you do not need to include any outlines as part of your responses). Third, be sure to draw on relevant literature to inform your answers. Last, citation format is up to you, although 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. Please do not include a bibliography or list of references.

## **IR Theory**

1. International relations scholarship has traditionally been categorized one of two ways: the “isms” approach, dividing scholarship into the realist, liberal, and constructivist traditions; or “levels-of-analysis” approach, dividing scholarship depending on its focus at the system, state, or individual levels. Describe these two ways of understanding scholarship in the field of international relations. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of each? Which approach do you see as promoting greater understanding of world politics, and why?
2. Power is a central concept in international relations scholarship. Discuss the role of power in a few (2-4) bodies of international relations theory. How does each body of theory understand the meaning and importance of power? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each body of theory’s approach to this central concept? And which of the approaches do you think provides the most logically compelling and/or empirically accurate understanding of the role and importance of power in international relations?
3. The contemporary world is experiencing two major forces. The first is deglobalization, or a decrease in economic interdependence between states in terms of their trade, investment, immigration, and the like. The second is democratic backsliding, or a decrease in the strength and number of democracies worldwide. What does international relations scholarship tell us about the likely effects of these two forces? Where do we see agreement or disagreement between theories regarding the likely effects of these two forces? And which accounts do you find most compelling, empirically accurate, and/or useful when thinking about these two forces and the future?

## **International Security**

1. In the study of coercion, scholars and policymakers alike have placed great emphasis on the credibility of threats. The more believable the threat, the argument goes, the more likely the target will comply. This emphasis has led to a profusion of literature on how states can enhance threat credibility, such as costly signaling, tying hands, and sinking costs. Yet to be effective, threats must be contingent: if the target meets the coercer's demands, the target must be confident the coercer will not carry out its threat anyway—or come back later with additional demands. Discuss at least two ways that such “assurance” or “commitment” problems can undermine coercive success. Be sure to define terms as appropriate and use empirical examples to illustrate your points.

2. Iran recently experienced possibly its worst episode of domestic unrest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ousted the Shah, with thousands killed and many more detained amidst a violent government crackdown. In the causes of war literature, internal conflict has often been linked to external (i.e., interstate) conflict, whether provoked by the state experiencing domestic upheaval or by its rivals. What mechanisms has the literature identified linking conflict inside a state to conflict between that state and other states? Are any of them plausible and/or supported by evidence? How plausible is external conflict involving Iran in this case?

3. In recent weeks, President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to annex Greenland by force, suggesting “I would like to make a deal the easy way, but if we don't do it the easy way we're going to do it the hard way.” An American invasion, occupation, and/or annexation of Greenland would contradict multiple widely-held norms and theories in IR. Discuss at least three such norms and/or theories and explain how a U.S. seizure of Greenland would contradict them. Assess the implications for these norms/theories. Would they be irrevocably damaged or remain largely unscathed? Would scholars need to rethink their beliefs about how the world works? Why or why not?

## **International Political Economy**

1. In the literature of international political economy, the building blocks for understanding economic policy choices are preferences and domestic institutions. By choosing one of the issue areas (of your interests) among trade policy, monetary policy, immigration policy, and fiscal policy, explain how the two foundational concepts - preferences and institutions - can be used to explain the cross-national variation in economic policy choices in response to increasing integration in the market for goods, labor, and financial capital.

2. How and why do the politics of international money differ from those of international trade?

3. In June 2016, the United Kingdom voted to withdraw from the European Union. Five months later, Donald Trump was elected president of the United States after running a campaign that promised high tariffs. What explains such backlashes against globalization in developed countries? If Brexit, Trump's 2016 election, and the rise of populism had similar causes, why has the US recently embraced a more protectionist trade policy than other developed countries?