

Comprehensive Examination: International Relations

George Washington University
Department of Political Science
August 2019

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

Section I

1. In the 1980s and 1990s, IR scholars vigorously debated whether international institutions have any independent effect on state behavior. Has this debate been resolved? Summarize the realist and constructivist critiques and describe some ways in which international laws and institutions are theorized to affect state behavior. Is there convincing empirical evidence that institutions change outcomes?
2. During the 1980s and 1990s, International Relations was consumed with inter-paradigmatic debate, pitting neorealism, neoliberalism and what later became constructivism against each other. The proponents of each of these views defended it as the most adequate perspective from which to understand world politics. But since then there has been a move away from "islands" of theory. What has produced this move? Should it be cause for celebration or despair?
3. In the contemporary era, rational choice-oriented approaches occupy a prominent position within political science, and, therefore, within international relations scholarship. To what extent does rational choice provide an appropriate lens through which to analyze international politics? What are the advantages of rationalist approaches, and what are the shortcomings? Your answer should make reference to specific bodies of literature and/or authors.
4. There has been a growing body of literature that has argued that hierarchy -- and not anarchy -- is the central organizing principle of international relations. What is the justification for this move? What different theoretical approaches have contributed to it? What are the different conceptions of hierarchy? What is at stake in this debate?

Section II

1. "The central premise of this book is that Clausewitz was wrong: moderation is not alien to war, and the self-imposed limitations of international law and custom are not 'imperceptible' but in fact are often crucial to determining how and when force is used in international

relations.” Assess this claim with regard to at least two norms, using evidence from multiple historical cases.

2. Possessing sufficient power to carry out one’s threats is thought to be crucial to the credibility of threats. If this is so, why does the United States have such a hard time compelling weaker states to back down in crises? If power is not the key to credibility in coercive diplomacy, what is?
3. “Targeting civilians in war is worse than a crime; it’s a blunder.” Do you agree or disagree? Support your argument with empirical evidence. Are there conditions under which this strategy might be effective?
4. What would you advise President Trump to do regarding Iran and North Korea’s nuclear programs? Ground your advice in relevant theories and empirical evidence.

Section III

1. It is possible that the global economic system is undergoing a transition from one where the US sets the rules to one where China sets the rules. What do different approaches to international relations have to say about the conditions under which such transitions take place? What do they have to say about the consequences? Which approaches are more or less convincing, and why?
2. The “Open Economy Politics” (OEP) approach to understanding IPE focuses on explaining the circumstances under which economies become more open. How might it explain the circumstances under which economies become more close in a world where some states are raising tariff barriers and moving back from integration. What are the other potential frameworks for explaining this, and are they more or less convincing than OEP?
3. Some scholars suggest that dominant approaches to international political economy over-emphasize the historic experience of the United States and Western Europe. What would international political economy look like if it better addressed the experience of other parts of the world. How would it differ from, and how would it be similar to the dominant approaches?
4. Much early work in international political economy started from a liberal institutionalist perspective. Looking at the world today, rather than the 1980s, what are the benefits and shortcomings of liberal institutionalism as an approach to understanding the world economy?