

Comprehensive Examination: International Relations

The George Washington University

Department of Political Science

August 2020

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, you should articulate a coherent argument in answering each question. Merely demonstrating that you have read the literature is insufficient for answering questions satisfactorily. Second, you should view the examination as an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of multiple literatures. Because your examination will be evaluated on its overall comprehensiveness, you should select questions and formulate responses that demonstrate the breadth of your preparation. Third, 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. There is no need to provide a bibliography or list of references.

Section I: IR Theory

1. Political science, and IR in particular, has always borrowed from other disciplines—economics, sociology, psychology, and anthropology, among others. Discuss two episodes of cross-disciplinary borrowing in the field and assess their success in advancing the IR field. What theoretical challenges did borrowing solve? What theoretical challenges did borrowing create?
2. Do international institutions have power? If so, what kind of power do they have and where does it come from? How might we conceptualize the power of these institutions theoretically? Be sure to define power and illustrate your argument with specific attention to two or more theoretical understandings of international institutions in your answer.
3. Is the field of IR sufficiently international? Most IR theories were developed by scholars trained in, and working in, the West. Many theories, such as theories of state formation, are based on the historical experience of Europe. How might IR theory look different if it began from non-western starting points? What assumptions might change? What kinds of theoretical equipment might emerge?
4. Where do interests come from in different IR theories? How do actors know their interests? How do we as analysts know interests when we see them in evidence? Compare and contrast the treatment of interests in three different theories. Explain how they know what interests are and use them in analysis. What are the virtues or utility of each approach? What are the drawbacks?

Section II: International Security

1. Since 9/11, the United States has engaged in a variety of efforts both to change the governments of foreign states and to help states confront armed internal challenges, including foreign-imposed regime change, military occupation, nation-building and state-building (i.e., forced democratization), third-party counterinsurgency (i.e., counterinsurgency with a host-nation partner), and security force assistance. What kinds of obstacles to success do interveners face in

situations like these? Focusing on all or a sub-set of these operations, describe the difficulties interveners confront and how they undermine the chances of success. Provide empirical examples. Under what conditions can missions like these succeed?

2. Events in the United States since the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis have cast a harsh spotlight on racism in this country. However, racism—or more broadly, identity-based prejudice—is not limited to domestic politics; it also plays a role in international affairs. Identify and discuss at least two ways that racial or identity-based prejudices have played a role in military or security affairs in global politics—historically or in the present. What were the effects of these prejudices on events or outcomes in your cases?
3. Over the past century, states on a number of occasions have formally or informally agreed not to use certain weapons or to get rid of such weapons entirely. To take a recent example, over 160 countries have ratified the Ottawa Convention banning the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel land mines. Why would states voluntarily disavow—whether in formal treaties, declaratory policy, or practice—militarily useful weapons of war? Provide examples from multiple cases/weapons.
4. Scholars have long known that compellence is hard. Spell out the reasons why it is hard and any conditions under which compellence success is more or less likely. Do nuclear weapons add anything to states' ability to compel concessions from adversaries? Explain why or why not, citing both the literature and empirical evidence.

Section III: International Political Economy

1. Scholars have offered diverse explanations for the populist backlash against globalization over the past five years. Some focus on the rise of capital-intensive production in rich democracies while others focus on institutional, normative, and cultural factors. Explain and adjudicate this debate. Which explanation(s) is most persuasive and why?
2. The Great Depression of the 1930s sparked a revolution in thinking about economic policymaking, with the rise of Keynesian economics and increased willingness of governments to intervene in their economies to offset recessionary pressures. Why did the 2008 Great Recession not yield a sustained return to Keynesian thinking, replacing the economic orthodoxy that was widely accepted in the developed world? Discuss the structural, institutional, material, and ideational explanations for this policy stickiness in the political economy literature.
3. Does economic globalization lead to a race-to-the-bottom in terms of domestic economic and social institutions? Why or why not? To what extent do these pressures from globalization vary along policymaking dimensions (i.e. finance, investment, and trade) and levels of economic development (i.e. developed vs. developing countries)? Provide empirical examples in support of your answer.
4. Observers of world politics have spent the last several years discussing the fall of the postwar Liberal International Order—arguing about whether such an order exists, whether it is coming to an end, and what might replace it. What is meant by the term “Liberal International Order”? Does the Liberal International Order shape international economics and politics? If so, how? What would be the consequences of its demise for the global economy?