

## **Comprehensive Examination: International Relations**

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

### *IR Theory*

1. How do the different major theoretical traditions in international relations map onto the current debates on the liberal international order?
2. For the last several years, various international relations scholars have gathered under the label of "Global IR." Please provide an overview of this "movement," its major complaints about the discipline, and assess whether its call for reforms are likely to be heeded.
3. What do the major institutional theories tell us about the fragility of contemporary global governance?
4. Two decades ago, the IR discipline was charged by the debate between rationalism and constructivism. Where has that debate gone and has it been useful?

### *International Security*

1. The "bargaining model of war" has become highly influential in security studies but has rarely been tested against competing explanations in historical cases. In an essay, compare "rationalist" and "non-rationalist" explanations for the 2003 Iraq War. Can this conflict be explained solely in rationalist terms?
2. As the Syrian Civil War raged in August 2012, President Barack Obama threatened to use military force if the Syrian government used chemical weapons but ultimately did not a year later when a Syrian gas attack killed over a thousand people. In contrast, President Donald Trump launched air strikes in 2017 and 2018 in response to alleged Syrian chemical attacks. Yet Trump seems constantly to be issuing military threats and not

- following through, as when he declared that U.S. forces were “locked and loaded” to strike Iran after Iranian missiles and drones attacked Saudi oil refineries last year but took no action. Beyond these particular episodes, does following through on threats matter for a nation’s credibility? Do a country’s threats become more or less believable depending on its record for fulfilling (or failing to fulfill) them? In an essay, summarize the relevant literature and make an argument for which perspective you think is most strongly supported by logic and evidence.
3. It is widely believed within the military and among the broader public that soldiers in combat are motivated to fight hard “for their buddies” and not by larger ideological concerns. Assess this claim and situate it in the broader literature on military effectiveness by first summarizing some common critiques of the “small unit cohesion” thesis and then comparing it to other theories of both “will” (i.e., combat motivation, staying power) and “skill.” In your view, what is the relative contribution of small unit cohesion to the overall production of combat power or battlefield effectiveness?
  4. Recent work in international security has begun to explore the international implications of variation in the domestic institutions of authoritarian regimes. In comparison, there has been relatively little literature on the international implications of such variation in democratic regimes. Summarize and critique at least two different examples of scholarship on the international security consequences of variation in authoritarian institutions. Based on your discussion, what kinds of variation in democratic institutions would you recommend that international security scholars explore?

### *International Political Economy*

1. International political economy scholars used to think that China would liberalize as it rose to international economic dominance, preserving the liberal international order. Now, many of them are more skeptical. In a short essay, draw on the relevant literature first to explain why many scholars believed that China would be more liberal, and second to explore how international relations scholars might theorize and characterize a China dominated international order under the assumption that China will not liberalize.
2. Over the last thirty years, the world has seen rapid integration in trade and finance. Yet the underlying economic logics of trade and finance are different. Draw on the relevant literature to explain these basic differences, and to explore how they have played out in differing controversies over e.g. trade and financial openness.
3. There has been relatively little discussion in international political economy of the importance of information technology, even as international platform companies have come to shape global information flows. How can international political economy best accommodate these questions? In an essay, explore how at least two major approaches to international political economy such as open economy politics or liberal institutionalism

might better address technology issues, explaining the basic frameworks they would adopt and the broad hypotheses they might investigate.

4. Some international political economy scholars suggest that the work of Karl Polanyi can help to explain recent economic crises and their political repercussions. In an essay, explain Polanyi's account of commodities and the "double movement," and how they may be applied to understand the domestic political backlash against globalization (which you should define precisely) in advanced industrial economies.