

Comprehensive Examination: International Relations

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

Section 1: International Theory

1. The state historically has been central to IR theory and is often treated as a unit of analysis.

Scholars today usually unpack the state in order to understand the influence of domestic politics. Often this unpacking focuses on understanding the domestic origins of state preferences. Usually, these studies treat state preference or foreign policy as the dependent variable, studying the state in isolation of the rest of the world. In doing so, many might worry that International Relations scholars, by focusing on the politics within the state, lose sight of broader structural relations between states. Describe the tradeoff scholars face between these approaches and what is gained by pursuing each.

2. Most canonical theories of international politics emphasize traditional forms of political governance, such as states and international organizations. Yet, many of the most important threats to the world come from groups with different forms, such as transnational extremist movements. Describe a few important theories that describe traditional political units which might extend to understand and explain newer forms of political community (e.g., ISIS)? What lessons might we draw for how to counter them?

3. International Relations scholars for decades engaged in paradigmatic debates between realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Today, these debates have gone out of style. Instead, modern scholarship is encouraged to be eclectic, bringing on insights from different worldviews. Some believe that this is productive because it is impossible to adjudicate which of those worldviews is "right." Therefore, the shift toward "middle range" theorizing represents the only path forward. Others disagree, arguing that the paradigmatic debates deepened the ways we think about world politics. For them, the shift to middle range theorizing represents an intellectual narrowing of the field, away from big ideas. What knowledge did the paradigmatic debates produce? What is gained and lost from the shift away from paradigmatic debates?

4. Power is a central concept in the study of international relations. Different theories operate with different understandings of power. What are the different conceptualizations of power? Are these

different conceptualizations, in your view, designed to address different kinds of outcomes? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different conceptualizations of power?

Section 2: International Security

1. The bargaining model of war has become enormously influential in the literature on the causes of interstate conflict. Yet this model has also been used extensively to explain the onset of civil conflict. After briefly sketching the basics of the bargaining approach to war and describing its application in the interstate setting, explore rationalist explanations for civil war. In your view, which is the strongest rationalist explanation for interstate war? For civil war? Why?

2. Recent work in international security has begun to explore the international implications of variation in the domestic institutions of authoritarian regimes. Summarize and critique at least two different examples of scholarship in this vein. Is this a promising area for future research?

3. Scholars in international relations have long held that compellence is more difficult than deterrence. Yet there is also substantial variation in compellence success, and scholars have advanced arguments about a number of factors that facilitate successful compellence. After briefly explaining why compellence is thought to be more difficult than deterrence, explore variables that have been invoked in the literature to explain why some compellent threats – or cases of military compellence in wartime – succeed whereas others fail. Are any of these arguments convincing? If so, explain how they increase the likelihood of success. If not, explain why they are flawed.

4. The theory that economic interdependence promotes interstate peace has long been dogged by the supposed failure of extensive interdependence among the European great powers to prevent the outbreak of World War I. Recent scholarship, however, has suggested that interdependence did not fail in 1914. Discuss some of the key contributions to this debate and evaluate the relative merits of the arguments.

5. Gilpin argued in *War and Change in World Politics* that “the principal mechanism of change throughout history has been [hegemonic] war” (Gilpin 1981, 15). Is this still true today in an age of democracy, interdependence, IOs, and nuclear weapons? Or is peaceful change (i.e., power transitions between declining hegemony and rising challengers) now possible? Assess the likelihood that such a transition between the United States and China, were it to occur, would be peaceful.

Section 3: International Political Economy

1. Much work in international political economy looks to explain the economic 'openness' of states. What is openness? What kinds of factors do scholars invoke to explain it? And do standard scholarly explanations continue to work well in the modern world economy? Draw on the relevant scholarly literature in your answer.

2. Scholars disagree about the relationship between power and efficiency considerations in shaping global economic institutions. This debate has become especially relevant in a world where the US is no longer as committed to multilateral institutions as it once was. In a short essay, draw upon the relevant scholarly literature to explain what is at stake in this disagreement, and what these different

approaches might predict will happen to institutions in a world where the US commitment to the liberal economic order has weakened.

3. Some international political economy scholars are skeptical that international organizations have any significant degree of autonomy from the states that created them. Others believe that international organizations can have substantial autonomy, and play a major independent role. In an essay answer, draw on the literature to lay out the different sides of this debate and to identify which seems most plausible and why. You should pay particular attention to the role of state interests.

4. Constructivists often argue that values and ideas play a key role in international economic politics, shaping the behavior, for example, of international organizations. Rationalists tend to discount values, although they do sometimes acknowledge that ideas can have significant effects. In a short essay, draw on the literature to examine this debate with respect to one particular area of international political economy (such as the economic role of international organizations or some other topic of similar breadth and broad relevance).