

Comprehensive Examination in International Relations
The George Washington University
September 11, 2015

Instructions: Major comprehensive exam candidates should answer one question from *each* of the three sections (general, international political economy, and security), as well as one further question from a section of their choosing. Minor comprehensive exam candidates should just answer one question from each of the three sections. Majors have 8 hours; minors have 6 to complete the exam.

I. General:

- The condition of anarchy creates significant challenges to cooperation and collective action in international politics. Under what conditions (if any) can states overcome these challenges? Discuss in your answer at least one major phenomenon of interest in the study of both international political economy and international security.
- Theories of both security and political economy have pointed to the importance of hegemony as leaders of the international system. Do you find these arguments persuasive? Why or why not?
- Theories of international relations are often divided/categorized according to levels of analysis. What are the strengths of this approach? What are its weaknesses/shortcomings?
- Different approaches to IR scholarship have reached divergent conclusions about the extent to which international institutions influence international outcomes; they disagree over whether institutions primarily reflect the interests of states or instead have a substantial impact of their own. Present a clear summary of these competing perspectives and assess their strengths and weaknesses.

II. International Political Economy:

- In 1970 Susan Strange called for scholars to better integrate insights from politics and economics in order to address pressing issues in international political economy. To what extent have scholars answered this call? How have they addressed (or not addressed) the kinds of political concerns raised by Strange, about topics such as the characteristics and consequences of American hegemony in their research? In your answer, be sure to draw on and organize the relevant academic literature.
- Non-state actors such as firms, business organizations and private regulators play a significant role in the world economy. To what extent has international relations scholarship sought to capture the role of such actors? How have scholars

characterized the relationship between these actors and states? Which research questions have received substantial attention and which have been relatively neglected? In your answer, be sure to draw on and organize the relevant academic literature.

- David Lake argues that international political economy scholarship has been primarily concerned with the question of “how, when, and why do countries choose to open themselves to transborder flows of goods and services, capital, and people?” What are the major theories that international relations scholars have used to explain openness and closedness to flows? In particular, what specific theories of preferences have these scholars used to explain openness and closedness? In a short essay, survey the field, describing the relevant theoretical perspectives and debates between them, and assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses in explaining state preferences over openness and closedness. In your answer, be sure to draw on and organize the relevant academic literature.
- Scholars disagree about when and whether economic sanctions have consequences for state behavior. In a short essay, discuss the debates around sanctions and their consequences, explaining why scholars have differing perspectives on the efficacy of sanctions, and examining the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.

III. Security:

- Russia’s annexation of Crimea and continuing involvement in eastern Ukraine has generated a debate over the sources of Russian expansion. One perspective focuses on western responsibility, specifically NATO expansion; the opposing view puts virtually all of the responsibility on Russia and little on the west. Explain this debate in terms of basic IR theories.
- More than twenty years ago, Robert Jervis declared that “MAD is a fact, not a policy,” noting that nuclear weapons had created a “revolution” in international politics. What was the nature of this supposed revolution? Was Jervis right or wrong? Incomplete? Why?
- Do you find material or ideational variables most persuasive in explaining the end of the Cold War? Does it matter? Explain. Begin by clearly laying out these alternative explanations.
- Military organizational behavior is often puzzling. What do we know about military organizational behavior thus far, what are the implications, and what important questions (if any) remain to be answered?