

## **Comprehensive Examination: International Relations**

The George Washington University

Department of Political Science

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Please answer three questions, one from each section. You have eight hours to complete the exam.

### **Section I – IR Theory**

1. Throughout much of the past two decades, theoretical debate in IR revolved around battles among “isms”—realism, (neo)liberalism, and constructivism. More recently, there has been a push to move away from research structured around battling “isms” to more problem-driven research, which seeks to generate and answer questions that focus more narrowly on specific international issues, without necessarily adhering to a particular “ism.” Has debate among “isms” been useful for the field? Why or why not? What would a move toward more problem-driven research look like? Would this be useful? What might be gained or lost?
2. Different approaches to international relations disagree on the relationship between anarchy and cooperation between states. How much of this disagreement is a result of the different ways in which these approaches conceptualize anarchy? Draw upon the relevant literature to discuss the different ways in which major approaches think about anarchy, and discuss the consequences of these differences for the level and kind of cooperation one might expect to see in international politics.
3. How have various strands of political realism shaped international relations theory? What are the principal strengths and weaknesses of these strands for explaining and/or understanding world politics?
4. Power is a central concept for many IR theories, but notions of power and its role in international politics vary widely. Briefly review some of the different understandings of power prominent in the field, and compare the kinds of research programs that each has yielded. Given changes in the world, do some of these notions look more useful for 21<sup>st</sup> century politics than others?

### **Section II – International Political Economy**

1. Voters and political candidates in Britain and the United States have expressed considerable resentment about economic globalization during the past year. What are some of the possible explanations for the widespread populist aversion to trade agreements, increased trade openness, and globalization? To what extent have standard trade models failed to account for such phenomena?
2. The case for the benefits of trade liberalization is founded on the theory of comparative advantage. The case for the liberalization of capital flows, on the other hand, has less well developed theoretical foundations. Yet both developed and developing countries have substantially liberalized capital flows (both portfolio capital and foreign direct investment) over the last two decades. How might we explain this policy change? Draw on important theories from international political economy in framing your answer. You might also address whether we should use the same theory to explain outcomes in both developed and developing countries.

3. The political and policy effects of growing economic integration or “globalization” have become a central topic in the study of international political economy. One controversy surrounds the concept of “convergence” and “races to the bottom.” Another involves the claim that globalization produces a “democratic deficit” both at home and with respect to international institutions. What are the global pressures that ostensibly produce these effects and how do they operate? Is there evidence that convergence in national policies is occurring or that globalization is undermining democracy?
4. The field of IR has moved away from the view that international institutions are epiphenomenal, reflecting merely the underlying power relations of the member states, to an understanding that international institutions matter for outcomes in their own right. Discuss this research agenda, with attention to theory and evidence.

### **Section III – International Security**

1. In the early 2000s, a book on the role of norms and force in international relations made the following provocative claim: “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.” Evaluate this claim by answering the following two questions. First, what are the origins of norms regulating the use of certain means of warfare? Select one such norm: explain where it came from, how it spread through the international system, and became accepted by (most) states. Second, do norms actually shape the behavior of states with regard to a stigmatized or proscribed means of force? If so, how? Give concrete historical examples, using the same norm discussed in part one of the question or other norms. Does a norm-based explanation provide a superior explanation for non-use than a material one, such as deterrence?
2. It is now widely believed among security scholars that democracies possess unique advantages that enable them to prevail in international crises and wars. Evaluate this proposition in light of recent literature on regime type and crisis/war outcomes.
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. Why has there been little if any meaningful balancing against the United States since the end of the Cold War? Assess the various reasons that scholars have advanced to explain this lack of balancing. Are they persuasive? Does the absence of balancing behavior falsify balance-of-power theory? Is the current structure of the international system likely to remain stable?