IR Comprehensive Exam January 2014

Major comprehensive exam candidates should answer one question from *each* of the three sections (security, international political economy and general), 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.

Section 1 – Security

1. A decade ago, 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 the domestic institutions of states, and in particular whether they are democratic or autocratic, exert a powerful influence on whether states will prevail in international crises or wars. In an essay, explain why scholars think that democracies are uniquely advantaged in *either* crisis bargaining *or* war-fighting and evaluate whether this conclusion is warranted given the empirical evidence and existing critiques in the literature.
3. The bargaining (or rationalist) model of war has become one of the most influential ways of analyzing the causes of war, but we know much more about war than is captured in these arguments. Explain the key insights this approach brings to the study of war. Then compare the bargaining model to at least three other prominent explanations of the causes of war in the literature. Does the rationalist model present a superior approach to explaining the outbreak of war? Are there complementarities between the rationalist accounts and the other arguments?

Section 2 – International Political Economy

1. 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.
2. The study of domestic (and comparative) political economy and of international political economy have traditionally been treated as distinct fields.  Some argue that this distinction is now obsolete with the rise of “globalization.”  Do you agree?  Support your argument both with references to theoretical debates in international political economy, and the use of real world examples.
3. Discuss the impact of international factors on domestic economic policy-making. Pay particular attention to explicating the different mechanisms claimed to connect international factors to policy-making. What is the empirical evidence in support of these mechanisms. What are the implications for the theories we use to explain understanding important outcomes in international political economy? Make sure you are clear about which “international factors” you are talking about in writing your answer.

Section 3 – General

1. 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? In a short answer, 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.
2. Early work on transnationalism and interdependence suggested that non-state actors played an important and independent role in world politics. This work, however came under sustained criticism. How do international relations scholars today think about the role of non-state actors and their relationship to states? Are there circumstances under which they believe that such actors can play a genuinely independent role? In a short answer, draw upon the relevant literature to discuss recent debates about non-state actors and their consequences for international relations.
3. Constructivism and rationalism start from very different micro-level accounts of the relationship between actors and their social context. What are the *practical* implications, if any, of these differences for scholarly research? In a short essay, draw upon the literature to ask how constructivist and rationalist approaches might be applied to two major research problems in international politics. Then explore whether there are any aspects of these problems that can be explained by constructivism but not by rationalism, or vice versa.