

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAM, August 12, 2016

Majors answer four questions. Non-majors answer three.

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

Section I – General

1. Do we need to understand domestic politics to make sense of international relations? Explain what we can and cannot understand in theories of international relations without theories of domestic politics.
2. Most theories in international relations do a better job explaining stasis rather than change. First elaborate on this generalization, drawing on examples from across the major theoretical traditions. Then identify and assess the exceptions, i.e. prominent theories or models of change. What should we learn, if anything, from the latter?
3. The international order established at the end of the Cold War is being challenged in fundamental ways and, according to some observers, is collapsing. What are the basic features of this international order? Who is challenging it and why? What does IR theory say about the establishment, characteristics, and challenges to these international arrangements?

Section II – International Security

4. The role of reputation for resolve or backing down in shaping coercive diplomacy outcomes is one of the most hotly debated topics in the security literature. What are the main strands of the reputation debate? What theoretical frameworks and methodological strategies have been used to tackle this question? Which arguments and empirical findings do you find most compelling?
5. U.S. alliances have recently come in for sharp criticism both politically and in the academic literature. Explain and evaluate the scholarly arguments for and against the current U.S. alliance network, making sure to connect them to broader theories of international relations.
6. Is great power war a thing of the past? Identify the key reasons/theories about why great power wars happen. Evaluate the likelihood of a major power war in the foreseeable future.

7. The security dilemma is one of the most powerful and enduring ideas in the study of international security. Explain the idea, including the variables that influence its intensity. Then evaluate its utility in assessing the prospects for U.S.-China or U.S.-Russia conflict in the near- and medium-term security environment.

Section II – International Political Economy

8. In the 1980s, much international political economy scholarship agreed with realists that there was an international system, but sought to show how states could cooperate on economic affairs. In the 1990s and 2000s, much international political economy scholarship abandoned the study of the international system, focusing instead on the domestic sources of interests and cooperation. What are the benefits of this change in emphasis? What are the losses? Write a brief essay examining the comparative merits and flaws of systemic and domestic-interest based accounts, drawing on the relevant literature.
9. In the 1980s, Susan Strange complained that mainstream international political economy simply 'aped' the work and ideas of microeconomists, failing to engage with other theoretical traditions. To what extent is this complaint fair today? What are the various key accounts of international political economy, how do they engage critically or favorably with microeconomics and related ideas, and do they provide any unique value that is not a simple a product of basic microeconomic theory? Write a short essay drawing on the literature to answer these questions.
10. Britain recently voted to leave the European Union (Brexit). One plausible international political economy interpretation of this decision is that it was a response to the ways in which the EU has lowered barriers to trade and migration. In a short essay, briefly describe the main approaches in IPE to understanding how states and voters respond to trade openness. Then discuss how each approach might explain the Brexit decision, describing the kinds of direct evidence that would support or disconfirm each approach.
11. Karl Polanyi, John Ruggie and others have argued that 'embeddedness' and 'disembeddedness' play key roles in explaining both how market economies work, and how they relate to the international system. In a brief essay, explain what the concepts of embeddedness and disembeddedness mean. Then discuss how they might or might not provide a useful lens on international political economy today.