

**Comprehensive Examination in International Relations  
May 2009**

*This examination is designed to test your knowledge of, and ability to synthesize, the complete field of international relations. The best answers will respond directly to the questions chosen and demonstrate a broad understanding of the literature on international relations. They will show the commonalities across, and gaps between, the different theoretical approaches, and the evolution of debates in and across those approaches. They will deploy relevant historical evidence in support of their arguments. Theoretical or empirical overlap among your answers will diminish their quality. (Note as well that citing UVa faculty, especially gratuitously, will not help your grade.) **Please note that the examination is “closed-book”—i.e., any use of notes, books, computer files, or internet sources constitutes an Honor violation.***

*“Majors” should answer one question from each of the three parts of the exam. “Minors” should answer one question from Part I and one from either Part II or Part III. Majors have six hours, and minors four, to complete the exam. You may either type your answers or write them by hand. If you choose the latter, make a clear photocopy and give Cassandra Thomas the original at the end of the allotted time. Then type up your answers word-for-word from the handwritten version (correcting spelling and minor grammatical errors, as you wish) and hand in the typed version within twenty-four hours. Include a signed pledge that the typed version is identical to the handwritten version.*

**Part I: Theory of International Relations**

1. Power is at the heart of many theories of international relations. The problem is that “power” defined as influence is tautological (we only know it when we see it) and power defined as “capabilities” leads to many cases where outcomes do not match predictions – for example, the United States war with Viet Nam. All power theories of international relations rely on one of these two basic definitions and therefore are inherently limited in explaining the world. Discuss.
2. Empirical political scientists outside of IR sometimes criticize broad IR theories (e.g. realism, liberalism, constructivism). They claim that there is little value added by developing broad theories that purport to explain all major aspects of relations between countries - they are of little use in answering specific substantive puzzles. These scholars advise that theory building should be more focused on substantive themes. Compare and contrast the merits of these two approaches to IR research. Support your arguments with references to the existing literature.
3. Most of international relations theory is simply a different and partial variant of the four fundamental questions of any rational-choice analysis: (1) who are the actors? (2) what strategies are available to them? (3) what are the possible outcomes? and (4) what are their preferences? The rational choice approach therefore provides the best framework to think about international relations. Discuss, using specific examples of empirical research in your answer.

4. "In the final analysis, states can never overcome one fundamental problem that cuts across all international issues: namely, that leaders cannot credibly commit today to upholding their promises to act in certain ways in the future. As a result, conflict in both security and economic affairs will be an ever-present reality in international politics." Do you agree or disagree? Why? Be sure to reference the appropriate literatures in your answer.

## **Part II: Applications to Issues**

1. Which is more nearly correct and why?
  - A) The ineffectiveness of organizations like the IMF and G20 during the current global financial crisis reveals what realists have argued all along: international institutions have no causal effects independent of the states that create and use those organizations.
  - B) The ineffectiveness of organizations like the IMF and G20 during the current global financial crisis reveals what constructivists have argued all along: epistemic communities - in this case bankers - dominate technical issue areas even when their sense of identity prevents them from proposing effective solutions.
2. "Institutional context is almost always the major driving force shaping the economic policies of states. Other factors operate as either subordinate facilitating or constraining factors or have little real causal role." Discuss this statement with reference to at least two important cases since 1870.
3. Terrorism is often described as a completely different form of armed conflict that cannot be understood with classic theories (ala Clausewitz, Schelling, Jervis etc). Has terrorism changed the fundamental nature and patterns of international conflict? If so, how?
4. "After all the American hand-wringing, and non-American glee, over the alleged fall of the American empire, it is once again clear that U.S. hegemony is intact and robust. It survived the Vietnam War in the 1970s; it survived Bush 43; it will survive the current global recession, as other governments realize they still need the United States to supply global public goods and must be willing to pay a price for that supply." Comment.
5. "Technological changes over the past one hundred years have fundamentally changed the nature of great power politics. Most of the major theories of conflict have not recognized this fact, and are thus largely invalid." Discuss with reference to at least two great-power cases.
6. Article One, Section One of the U.N. Charter begins: "the purposes of the United Nations are: 1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threat to the peace." To what extent was collective security and international law important during the Cold War and how has its salience changed in the post-Cold War era?

### **Part III: Regional and Area Foreign Policies**

1. "Obama's election will have little impact on U.S. foreign policy. He will basically follow the main contours of Bush's second term foreign policy." Agree or disagree while explicitly examining different theories of foreign policy. Use other episodes in U.S. history as appropriate. (Do not answer if you answered question 4 from section II)
2. Discuss the extent to which concerns about national security versus concerns about domestic stability and continued elite dominance determine the foreign policies of states in one of the following regions (pick only one):
  - i) East/Southeast Asia
  - ii) South Asia
  - iii) Middle East
  - iv) North Africa and/or Sub-Saharan Africa
  - v) Russia and its periphery
  - vi) Europe
  - vii) Latin America
3. "The stagnation of European integration since 2005 demonstrates that, even in supposedly postmodern Europe, state interests remain paramount." Comment, referring to the relevant IR theories.
4. The last 20 years have seen the reemergence of leftist parties in Latin America. How and why would this change in the domestic partisanship of governments have an effect on the foreign economic policies of countries in this region? Would leftist governments in East Asia behave differently? Why or why not?