

Comprehensive Examination in International Relations August 2010

*This examination is designed to test your knowledge of, and ability to synthesize, the complete field of international relations. The best answers will demonstrate a broad understanding of the literature on international relations. They also will respond directly to the questions – mere literature reviews will not do – and will deploy both analytical rigor and relevant evidence in support of their arguments. Theoretical or empirical overlap among your answers will diminish their overall quality; avoid answering two or three questions for which your answers would be redundant. Gratuitous citations of UVa faculty 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.***

IR Majors should answer one question from each of the three parts of the exam. IR 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) and hand in the typed version within twenty-four hours. Include a signed pledge that the typed version is identical to the handwritten version.

SECTION I: THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) Whether out of appropriate scientific ambition, ignorance, or desperation, scholars of international politics search for general theories that would account for behavior of actors in the international system. To do so, they necessarily simplify reality. At the most basic level, several approaches to the generation of knowledge have been proposed. Some suggest that inductive processes should be used, while others claim that deductive approaches are essential. Some suggest that detailed knowledge of complex interactions must be pursued, while others counter that parsimony is the key to scientific progress. Carefully outline your own position towards knowledge generation. State the key elements that make you believe that this is a productive approach. Can knowledge increase by further division of approaches or through some sort of reconciliation? What common grounds are essential for a productive dialogue?

2) “Competing IR paradigms appeal to different actors and mechanisms, but all predict some conflict and some cooperation among states; all acknowledge that ideas and interests ‘matter’; all are open to various methodologies. The fundamental differences among the

paradigms are actually normative: realists, liberals, and constructivists disagree as to how states *should* behave under various conditions.” Comment.

3) Compare and contrast distributional conflict and imperfect information as explanatory factors in international relations in the areas of (a) international conflict and cooperation and (b) foreign economic policies.

4) “To explain the most important decisions in international politics, scholars must understand that national leaders are politicians first and statesmen second. Their domestic interests, not national interests, drive their choices. Domestic-level theories therefore will always be superior to theories built upon external factors.” Make an argument for or against this statement, referring to specific literature and empirical findings where appropriate.

SECTION II: APPLICATIONS TO ISSUES

1) Many international relations theories feature a variable one value of which has been termed “status-quo preference,” “satisfaction,” or “stakeholding in the international system,” and the opposite value of which is typically termed “revisionism.” While much analytic lifting is left to such a variable, there has been little effort to conceptualize or operationalize it. Discuss how you would propose to ameliorate this deficiency.

2) Some of the recent literature on globalization/internationalization has suggested that international capital mobility should be treated as a structural constraint on domestic politics. Other literature argues that capital mobility actually empowers domestic political actors. This debate seems to echo the debate between dependency and modernization theories that occurred during the last three decades. What are the similarities and differences between dependency/modernization and globalization? Does international capital mobility constrain national policymaking? In your answer be sure to cite the relevant literature and arguments.

3) Scholars are sharply divided over the relative importance of domestic politics vs. “diffusion” as explanations for states’ foreign economic and security policies. Is this sharp division warranted or can the two mechanisms be fruitfully combined? Why or why not?

4) One of the most important debates in international relations during the past two decades concerns the uniqueness of democracies in international affairs. Scholars have variously asserted that democracies are less likely to fight wars (either in general or with one another); more reliable trading and alliance partners; better members of international institutions; more likely to get involved in winnable wars; more effective on the battlefield; better able to generate military power; better military innovators; more credible when making threats in crises; and on and on. Evaluate this body of literature (not necessarily each of the above claims), citing specific empirical literature in your response. Be sure to make an argument about whether the “democratic uniqueness” argument is truly valid.

SECTION III: REGIONAL AND AREA FOREIGN POLICIES

- 1) Some scholars today claim that US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War is most heavily shaped by partisan conflict. Yet there seems to be extraordinary continuity across different administrations, Republican and Democratic. How can we explain such continuity given that, in an age of unipolarity, there are few compelling systemic constraints on the United States?
- 2) In recent years Turkey has begun to engage more actively in the regional politics of the Middle East. Why? Over time, what effect on the region, if any, should we expect Turkish engagement to have?
- 3) Realists and liberals have long argued that commercial transactions – e.g., trade, investment, and loans – have security externalities. Please offer a realist and a liberal prognosis of the future of Sino-American relations in the context of their burgeoning economic exchanges but also remaining political differences, and discuss which prognosis is more persuasive to you (and why). Make sure that your prognoses and discussion are embedded in the relevant literature.
- 4) Relative to Europe, East Asia is under-institutionalized, is more prone to multi-polar security tensions, and has failed to resolve historical grievances that have led key states to view each other warily. All of these characteristics, according to various IR theories, ought to make the region “ripe for rivalry.” Yet it has avoided security conflict since 1980 and has grown faster than any other region of the world in recent decades. Can we reconcile Asia's recent experience with predictions growing out of IR theory?
- 5) Which IR theories, if any, best explain the relatively pacific relations among Latin American countries over the past century?
- 6) Notwithstanding the existence of SAFTA, in 2008 intra-regional trade in South Asia was only 5.5 percent of total foreign trade by these countries. What explains the persistent failure of South Asia to become as economically integrated as most other regions of the world? What changes would need to occur to make SAFTA as successful as ASEAN?
- 7) “IR theory is of no value in explaining relations among countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The region is far better explained via the theories of comparative politics.” Comment.
- 8) “The poor management of the European debt crisis by European countries proves once again that collective action problems are the main cause of failures of cooperation under anarchy.” Discuss.
- 9) “Since the 1990s Russia has acted like a traditional great power – trying to extend its control in its own region, to block the extension of U.S. power where possible, and so on – not because realism is the best IR theory, but because Vladimir Putin is a realist.” Comment.