

Comprehensive Examination in International Relations August 2006

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 and processes of 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) James Fearon and Alexander Wendt have written: “The idea of a battle royal or ‘Great Debate’ between rationalism and constructivism is appealingly dramatic, but properly understood many of the issues [of disagreement between them] dissolve upon close inspection” (2002, 67). With regard to the study of international relations, are rationalism and constructivism mutually exclusive? If so, can we use evidence to decide which is better? If not, why are they so often treated as if they were in competition, indeed in mortal combat?
- 2) To what degree can international institutions and shared norms overcome the traditional problems of anarchy in the global system? What are their limitations, if any?
- 3) “Offensive realism, defensive realism, neorealism, structural realism, neoclassical realism, hegemonic stability theory ... it’s time for a bit of realism about IR theory: We can state clearly neither (1) the locations of the conceptual boundaries dividing all of these theories, nor (2) how we would know which realism is most adequate to explaining

international relations. This obscurity casts serious doubt on IR's social-scientific credentials." Comment.

Part II: Applications to Issues

- 1) Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (2005, 2) contend, "Since E. H. Carr, realists have tended to treat power as the ability of one state to use material resources to get another state to do what it otherwise would not do. The tendency of the discipline to gravitate toward realism's view of power leads, ironically, to the underestimation of the importance of power in international politics." Critically assess their argument by discussing the role of power in shaping global economic governance. Consider at least two empirical examples to support your arguments.
- 2) Consider the following passages, and discuss whether you think the "global war on terror" justifies the argument that the restraints of international law and the just war tradition must be set aside.
 - i) "...we conclude that torture as defined in and proscribed by [U.S. law implementing the International Convention Against Torture] covers only extreme acts...Because the acts inflicting torture are extreme, there is a significant range of acts that though they might constitute cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment fail to rise to the level of torture. Further we conclude that under the circumstances of the current war against al Qaeda and its allies, application [of the law implementing the CAT] to interrogations pursuant to the President's Commander-in-Chief powers may be unconstitutional. Finally, even if an interrogation method might violate [the law] necessity or self-defense could provide justifications that would eliminate any criminal liability." (U. S. Justice Dept. Memo to White House counsel Gonzales, August 2002; the "Bybee memorandum." *Note: In December 2004 the Justice Dept issued a new opinion that "superseded [this memo] in its entirety."*)
 - ii) "We say 'never again,' but somewhere someone is being tortured right now, and acute fear has again become the most common form of social control. To this the horror of modern warfare must be added as a reminder. The liberalism of fear is a response to these undeniable actualities, and it therefore concentrates on damage control... Systematic fear is the condition that makes freedom impossible, and it is aroused by the expectation of institutionalized cruelty as by nothing else." (Judith Shklar)
- 3) Why are foreign policy revolutions (i.e., radical changes in a state's basic orientation toward the external world) so rare? Be sure to use evidence to support your argument.
- 4) "The Europeans and Americans could easily solve their nuclear dispute with Iran if they would just follow the logic of rational deterrence theory and help Iran gain a robust nuclear deterrent." Explain the logic in question. Why do the Europeans and Americans not follow it? How does your answer implicate both rational deterrence

theory and the utility of IR theory in general?

- 5) “The way the Cold War ended and the long period of great-power peace witnessed since 1990 reveal the stark limitations of the realist world view.” Discuss.

Part III: Regional and Area Foreign Policies

- 1) Measured by purchasing power parity, China’s economy is the world’s second largest (\$8.86 trillion in 2005), and if current trends continue it will overtake America’s by 2026. Analyze Sino-American relations over the past fifteen years in light of these facts, making the case for the school or schools of IR theory that can best account for the pattern of bilateral relations.
- 2) Assess the relative influence of system-level and unit-level influences, respectively, on foreign policy in one of the following since 1992:
 - i) Russia
 - ii) Middle East
 - iii) Latin America
 - iv) Japan
 - v) South Asia
- 3) How well do either offensive realists or defensive realists explain the nature of great-power relations since the end of the Cold War? Do other approaches provide greater explanatory power?
- 4) “Recent events—the latest Mideast wars, Russian energy recalcitrance—show that the European Union, like the S.S. *Titanic* with respect to passenger steamships, reached maximum size just its utility was waning. The EU, as an international project based on law rather than violence, is unable to command respect from other global states and non-state actors for whom violence represents the only viable currency of international politics.” Discuss.
- 5) The reasons for the U.S. decision to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein have been hotly debated. Discuss some of the leading explanations and show how they can be fitted into one or more of the theoretical models used to explain foreign policy.
- 6) How has globalization affected, and been affected by, events in either Latin America or sub-Saharan Africa since 1990?