

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination in International Relations  
Fall 2014  
Morning Session

Answer one of the following questions.

1. IR scholars have traditionally justified separating international and domestic politics by asserting that international politics take place in an anarchic setting, while domestic politics take place in a hierarchical or ordered setting.
  - a. Are there good reasons to doubt either part of this assertion? That is, is there reason to doubt that international politics are clearly anarchic, or that domestic politics are clearly not?
  - b. Should the two fields be treated completely separate? Can insights from one inform the other? Why or why not?
  
2. David Lake (2011) argues that the field of international relations should eschew a focus on grand theory (or the “isms”) and “focus instead on developing contingent, mid-level theories of specific phenomena.”
  - a. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
  - b. If you agree, should we still teach our students about grand theory? Why or why not?
  - c. If you disagree, explain what you see as the proper roles of grand and mid-level theories in international relations scholarship. Should all mid-level theories be derived from grand theory? Do grand and mid-level theories serve useful, but separate, purposes?

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Afternoon Session

Answer two of the following questions.

1. What evidence is there to suggest that international institutions have an independent effect on government behavior? What are the difficulties in identifying the effects of international institutions on state behavior? Discuss how these difficulties can be addressed and cite relevant studies. On balance, does the evidence weigh in favor of or against claims that institutions are important determinants of behavior in IR? Cite relevant studies for at least two policy areas (e.g., security, trade, finance, environmental policy, human rights, humanitarian law, etc.).
2. Assume that explicit assumptions about human decision making are required for effective theories of international relations. Evaluate rational and cognitive assumptions in terms of their capacity to provide a foundation for building international relations theory and for conducting foreign policy analysis.
3. How do individual grievances grow into large-scale violent civil wars? In your answer, include information about both the strategic and tactical considerations of the aggrieved as well as the response of the state to grievance.
4. For leading powers like the United States, is the development and implementation of “grand strategy” possible – or even preferable - in an environment that is defined by ambiguous threats, the proliferation of non-state actors, asymmetric war, and various domestic political pressures? Why or why not? Use historical and contemporary examples from the grand strategy literature to support your answer.
5. To what extent do domestic political institutions and actors constrain executives in their foreign policy decision-making? How does the answer vary with different regime types, issues and circumstances? Discuss with respect to both international security and international economic relations.
6. Why do state actors violate their citizens' physical integrity rights? Answer by developing and applying YOUR preferred theory of government respect for physical integrity. Based on that theory, what can be done to prevent violations of physical integrity rights?
7. How are the nature of the international system and the interaction of actors within the international system affected by the existence of nuclear weapons? In other words, what would be different about international relations (conflict, cooperation, war, etc.) if nuclear weapons did not exist?