

International Relations Comprehensive Exam (Fall 2019)

Part I: General (Morning) Questions

Answer one of the following two questions. Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.

- 1) 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 or disagree 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?
- 2) What are the most significant theoretical *and* empirical contributions to the study of international relations over the past 25 years? In your answer discuss at least one theoretical contribution and one empirical contribution, citing examples from the literature. Be sure to explain how these contributions have advanced the state of knowledge, as this will require a broader evaluation concerning the condition of the subfield. Finally, discuss some existing weaknesses in the subfield of international relations that remain even with the contributions you note.

Part II: Subfield (Afternoon) Questions

Answer two of the following questions. Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.

- 1) Assume that explicit assumptions about human decision making are necessary to construct coherent explanations of state behavior. Critically evaluate the utility of building IR theory using cognitive assumptions. Focus on their capacity, relative to rationalist assumptions, to provide a foundation for international relations and foreign policy analysis that advances the field conceptually and empirically.
- 2) In the context of national security in the United States, critically evaluate the utility of the "intelligence cycle" as a framework to understand the relationship between the intelligence community and foreign policy. What can be done to improve this process? In your answer, explicitly locate the intelligence cycle into a broader foreign policy framework.
- 3) After several decades of quantitative research on international conflict, are we any closer to a unified theory of war? In your answer, identify the key insights, if any, supplied by this research and explain why they are important. Next, is there a theoretical framework in the literature on war that can coherently piece together the various empirical findings on this topic? If so, what is it? If not, what is the best available framework?
- 4) Compliance with the international rules/laws varies greatly across countries within particular institutions, and across institutional settings. What explains why some institutions are more effective than others at eliciting compliance? What explains why some countries are more likely to comply with institutional rules than others?
- 5) Many contend that non-state actors have grown in their numbers and influence in the last twenty years. How have non-state actors been incorporated into IR theory? Are the growth of these actors in society influencing IR in lasting ways? Focusing on any one type of non-state actor (firms, terrorist organizations, NGOs, etc.), what are a few of the big questions left for scholars to understand?
- 6) Much recent research on human rights and human security concerns how international actors can or cannot influence human rights/human security outcomes in specific countries. In your opinion, what are the two most promising avenues for how international actors can influence human rights/human security outcomes? Please evaluate the quality of the evidence in this area. What questions remain?
- 7) How do individual grievances grow into large-scale, violent conflict (i.e., civil war)? In your answer, be sure to discuss the strategic and tactical considerations of the aggrieved, problems of collective action, etc. Be sure to include a discussion of the state's response to grievances, and how this may contribute to or help prevent violent conflict.