International Relations Field Exam
January 2019

Please answer one and only one question from each of the three sections below. Keep in mind that you will be evaluated not only on your knowledge of the relevant literature, but also on your ability to think independently and make a compelling argument.

Section I (pick one):

1. Many classic theories of international relations treat states as unitary actors with well-defined national interests. Recent work in international security, IPE, and cooperation departs from this approach, as scholars devote more attention to domestic political entities, processes, and institutions. Has this turn improved the development of generalizable theories of IR? Discuss some examples, evaluate whether the gains in explanatory power merit the loss of parsimony, and specify the conditions, if any, under which the unitary actor assumption is preferable.

2. What is the role of the "rationality assumption" in IR theory? What are the pros and cons of deploying it when building a theory of international relations? Discuss in light of relevant examples in the scholarship.

Section II (pick one):

1. Traditional, unscientific work on the causes of war pointed to factors such as human nature, elite and bureaucratic preferences, and state motives, among many others drivers of conflict. More recently, rationalist explanations for war focus on incomplete information, commitment problems, and the indivisibility of disputed objects as the only rational causes of war. What, in light of this shift in the literature, is the role played by the "classical" causes of war mentioned above? How was this shift productive?

2. What would you advise president Trump to do regarding Iran and North Korea's nuclear programs? Ground your advice in relevant theories and empirical evidence.

Section III (pick one):

1. In the 1980s and 1990s, IR scholars vigorously debated whether international institutions have any independent effect on state behavior. Has this debate been resolved? Summarize the realist critique and describe some ways in which international laws and institutions are theorized to affect state behavior. Is there convincing empirical evidence that institutions change outcomes? Cite specific examples and discuss how studies have dealt with obstacles to causal inference.

2. Eric Posner argues that we need to abandon international law of human rights because it lacks efficacy, and focus on development and aid instead because those are effective. Do you find this view persuasive? In making your argument, use both theory and empirical evidence, including concrete examples.