

International Relations Field Exam
August 2016

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. In a 1999 exchange in *International Security*, Stephen Walt wrote, “Formal techniques [mathematical theory] facilitate the construction of precise and deductively sound arguments, but recent efforts in security studies have generated comparatively few new hypotheses. ... The growing technical complexity of recent formal work has not been matched by a corresponding increase in insight, and as a result, recent formal work has relatively little to say about contemporary security issues.” To what extent are Walt’s claims true of work produced in the past two decades, say, since 1995? What have we learned about world politics by using formal mathematical theory? Specifically, give arguments for, and examples of, how formal theory has been (or would have been) useful; and give arguments for, and examples of, how formal theory has not been (or would have not been) useful.
2. During the 1980s and 1990s, International Relations was consumed with inter-paradigmatic debate, pitting neorealism, neoliberalism and what later became constructivism against each other. The proponents of each of these views defended it as the most adequate perspective from which to understand world politics. Since the late 1990s, however, the discipline has (at least in part) embraced strategic interaction as the proper unified template for analyzing international interactions and moved beyond inter-paradigmatic debates. At the same time, grand theorizing has largely been abandoned and replaced with so-called mid-level theorizing and, during the past decade, hypothesis testing using research designs that attempt to approximate the logic of randomized control trials. Were these two moves unmitigated positive developments for IR as a field of study? Why? Justify your argument with examples of knowledge gained using post-paradigmatic and quasi-experimental research.

Section II (pick one):

1. IR has extensively studied the causes of war. Still, as policy makers and citizens we want to know more than who is likely to fight, and when. We also want to reduce the probability of destructive wars: we want to identify policy levers for reducing the probability of war. Given your understanding of the causes of war and assessment of the scholarship on the topic, what are the policy levers most likely to reduce the odds of war? Back up your appraisal with theory and evidence. (You may want to consider different kinds of wars, as well as different kinds of levers.)
2. Deterrence theory was developed during the Cold War with the overarching goal of avoiding a nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers while nevertheless extracting influence from military power. Discuss critically the major contributions to deterrence theory, evaluating their logic and existing evidence in their support. Include rational and psychological perspectives. Furthermore, assess the utility of deterrence theory in today’s strategic environment, which entails considerable non-state threats.

Section III (pick one):

1. In the aftermath of the United Kingdom's vote on June of 2016 to leave the European Union (EU), many commentators suggested that a weakening EU showed how international economic institutions were unable to succeed and were, in fact, currently in decline. Using IR theories of international institutions, with an emphasis on economic institutions, discuss the merits of current critics of the EU and their skeptical arguments.
2. Presidential candidate Donald Trump has suggested that the United States should target and torture the families of known terrorists as a counterterrorism tactic. This would be in clear violation of international law. Do you think that if Mr. Trump, or any president of the United States, went ahead with such a tactic, the country would suffer any consequences from breaching international humanitarian law? Refer to the literature and empirical record in answering the question.