

Columbia University Department of Political Science
Written Qualifying Examination in International Relations
January 14, 2019

Instructions

This examination consists of four sections: World Politics A (WPA) consists of general international relations questions; World Politics B (WPB) consists of somewhat narrower or more specific questions; the last two sections consist of questions on international security (IS) and international political economy (IPE).

Majors in IR must write three essays: one from WPA, one from either the IS or IPE section, and one from any other section (that is, you may not write more than one essay in any one section).

Minors in IR must write two essays: one from WPA, and one from any other section.

You are advised to demonstrate breadth as well as depth of knowledge in your set of essays. You should therefore avoid writing essays with answers that overlap substantially with respect to either theoretical arguments or substantive examples.

World politics A

1a. “Just as most of the great material improvements in the life of persons and societies have come from ideas, mainly advances in science and technology, so the worst international crimes and horrors of the twentieth century (both world wars, Nazism, communism, the Holocaust, other genocides, integral nationalism and tribal war, terrorism) have sprung above all from ideas and outlooks.” Discuss.

2a. Why should states care about status, prestige, or honor? Discuss with reference to at least two different perspectives. Define key terms.

World Politics B

1b. An increasingly common theoretical move in social science is to attach psychological or perceptual hypotheses to a rationalistic framework, as in “behavioral economics.” What hypotheses might emerge by attaching typically nationalist perceptions, myths, worldviews, cognitive heuristics, or psychological biases to the rationalist framework of the bargaining theory of war? Might there be any ontological inconsistency in joining together these different frameworks?

2b. “When states fail to comply with specific international legal rules, this demonstrates the irrelevance of international law for ordering and constraining international affairs.” Discuss the conditions under which this statement may, or may not, be accurate using at least two specific examples.

3b. Once the Cold War ended there seemed to be no reason why the U.S., or the West in general, should militarily intervene in other countries. Yet soon this happened with some frequency. Explain this.

4b. Rebels and governments use diverse repertoires of violence in civil wars. How should we conceive of these repertoires? When are belligerents likely to use more or less of a specific form of violence (i.e. genocide, terrorism, sexual violence, displacement, high-casualty control) and how do they strategize between different repertoires of violence? What does this imply for how policymakers might prevent atrocities during wars?

IPE

1ipe. North and Weingast (1989) argue that political institutions of limited government allowed England to credibly commit to upholding property rights. Apply their argument to the contemporary problem faced by many governments of attracting foreign direct investment. Do democratic political institutions provide a commitment mechanism to not expropriate foreign investors? After explicating why this might be the case, provide an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this argument. Discuss critically some empirical approaches that can be used to evaluate the relationship between democratic political institutions and foreign investment, and select the approach that you would find most convincing.

2ipe. Recently, the WTO has come under attack, with the U.S. threatening to withdraw altogether. What would be the consequences of such a move for international trade? In your answer, please address what purposes the institution serves, who benefits from it, and its effect on international trade and investment.

Security

1is. “The world has changed so much that the Clausewitz no longer can help us understand what the problems are and what to do about them.” Discuss.

2is. “Theorists of security policy have too often mistakenly conflated countries’ material interests, in terms of economic or military power, with their governments’ motives in international competition. Actual decisions by political leaders, however, more often flow from emotional concerns about honor, credibility, identity, or standing.” Discuss.