

**International Relations
General Examination
CORE QUESTIONS (DAY ONE)
Fall 2010**

ANSWER ONE QUESTION EACH FROM PART A, PART B, AND PART C. YOU HAVE EIGHT HOURS TO COMPLETE THIS SECTION OF THE EXAM.

Part A: Theory

1) Who is IR For?

Robert Cox wrote over 25 years ago that all knowledge in IR is for someone or some purpose, and as such pure objectivity is impossible; as philosophers of science today might put it, all knowledge is “situated.” In an era dominated even more than in Cox’s day by the United States and liberalism more generally, the question of who or what purpose(s) “IR” serves remains a pointed one, and in particular whether the predominance of American scholars in the field biases the field’s production of knowledge in problematic ways. Who or what purpose(s) will your own work serve, and how do you conceive of your responsibilities in that respect?

2) The Declining Half-Life of IR Scholarship

Part of what makes IR a social science is the aspiration to develop generalizations that will hold not just across space but across time, with the longer the better. Had IR existed back then in pre-modern times this might have been relatively easy, given the very slow pace of social, political and technological change. However, in the past century and especially the last two decades the speed and geographic scope of change has intensified dramatically, and with the spread of the internet shows no signs of slowing down. This suggests that the “half-life” of generalizations in IR will get increasingly shorter, making the goal of a social science of IR ever more elusive and eventually turning us all into “slow journalists.” Do you agree, and why or why not? Illustrate with selected bodies of IR scholarship that have either retained their epistemic value over time or lost it.

Part B: Methods

3) One of the issues that scholars in international relations often face (though perhaps not as often as they should) has to do with causal heterogeneity—a situation in which different cases/observations are produced by different causal mechanisms, or data-generating processes. Its opposite, causal homogeneity, occurs when they are produced by the same mechanism or process. At one end of the spectrum, large-N researchers often assume that the observations in datasets with thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of observations are causally homogeneous; on the other, case study researchers are prone to point out the unique causal features of each case that they study.

Choose one specific research area with which you are familiar in international

relations. Explain what you believe to be the appropriate degree of causal heterogeneity or homogeneity to posit within that research area when investigating it, based on what we now know about it, and describe the methodological tools that you would choose to do so based on that answer.

4) Most commonly qualitative and non-qualitative methods are treated as antithetical to one another. Is this true? What do these broad approaches share? What separates them? Realize (of course) that there are many different methods under each rubric, so please be specific in your answer. Conclude by choosing some work in international relations that utilizes (or attempts to utilize) both approaches. Evaluate why it was or was not fruitful and indicate how it could have been improved.

Part C: Policy

5) With power more diffused and authority more contested, how will the newly powerful states (e.g., China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey, etc.) try to shape or remake global rules and order? Are the struggles over order and governance essentially struggles over the distribution of authority (who has a seat at the table; rights and privileges within existing institutions) or deeper struggles over basic principles and organizational visions (who commands and who benefits)?

6) The current American-led international order is eroding and giving way to something new. The United States may still remain the most important state in the system but its role and influence will diminish. On the other side of this transition, what sort of order might emerge? To help you answer this question, here are five alternative futures defined in terms of a specific driver:

1. Economic breakdown and closure. This is an order in which the open, rule-based world economy gives way to blocs, spheres, and geo-economic conflict. The 1930s are the inspiration for this future.
2. Diffusion of power. A state system in which states do not have the capacities to shape and direct the system. This is not a power transition process but a power diffusion process. No state or group of states is in control.
3. Great power concert. The unipolar system transitions to a multipolar system in which the great powers (old and new) find ways to build an architecture for joint management of the system.
4. Great power conflict. The unipolar system transitions to a multipolar system that is permeated by the problems of anarchy – insecurity, rivalry, arms races, nationalism, competition for resources, etc.
5. Non-state actors drive the system. The rise of all sorts of non-state actors – terrorist groups, bankers, NGOs, and transnational actors – grow in importance and reshape the system.

Which of these five alternative futures do you believe is most likely to replace the current order and why?