

**International Relations
Candidacy Examination
CORE QUESTIONS
Autumn 2007**

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) The Contradictions of Liberal Hegemony

A venerable tradition in the social sciences, dating at least to Marx, explains long run social change by reference to structural contradictions in existing orders. Consider then the following proposition. Order in the international system has long been based on the normative priority of state sovereignty, which is inherently particularistic: at least in theory, each political community decides for itself how to live. Liberalism, in contrast, is based on the priority of individual rights, which are universalistic: at least in theory, human rights trump citizenship. This foundational difference means that the current international system dominated by liberal states is contradictory and thus inherently unstable in the long run. Universalistic ideology makes liberal states more prone than other states to disregard the principle of non-intervention, a “liberal imperialism” that inevitably generates conflict with illiberal states; and in a curious twist, liberal states are also more prone to putting themselves out of business by pooling their sovereignty (think of the EU), since in a liberal world there is no need for particularistic states in the first place. In the end, therefore, one of these organizing principles will have to give way before the other.

Do you agree or disagree, and why? Are structural contradictions a useful way to think about system change in world politics? Discuss in light of relevant IR scholarship on system change and evolution.

2) Individuals and Agency in World Politics

After many years in which structural theorizing seemed virtually hegemonic, within IR scholarship there has recently been much talk of “bringing agency back in.” Yet, with the exception of some foreign policy scholarship, the most obvious source of agency – the human individual – remains highly marginal in the field; our units of analysis are still overwhelmingly corporate “agents” like states, MNCs, and NGOs. This neglect of the individual is doubly surprising because many pivotal events in contemporary world politics seem inexplicable without reference to individuals. Would the Cold War have ended so peacefully without Gorbachev? Would the Iraq War have occurred without George Bush? And what about Osama bin Laden?

Why has the IR field failed to take individuals seriously as agents in world politics, and is this justified? If so, how else to think about agency if not in terms of human agency? If not, how should we “bring individuals in,” and relate them to other kinds of agents? And what is at stake in your answer?

PART B: METHODS

1) Measuring Interests

Many debates in IR scholarship seem to turn on the realism of the assumptions that theorists make about the motivations or interests of relevant actors (1). Many realists and rationalists, for example, assume that states are intrinsically self-regarding and as such follow a logic of consequences in their foreign policy; many constructivists, in contrast, assume that states are at least in part other-regarding and as such often follow a logic of appropriateness. Yet, motivation is notoriously difficult to get at empirically. As a mental state we cannot observe it directly even at the individual level (the Problem of Other Minds), and what we can observe directly – behavior – may be compatible with a variety of motive states. This empirical problem poses a challenge to moving forward in some of our most fundamental theoretical debates.

Taking self- versus other-regarding state interests as your example, design a research program that would enable us to determine, empirically, which motivational assumption is a more realistic basis for theorizing – not just in one or two favored cases, but for the population of states as a whole. What methods would you use to draw inferences, and on the basis of what kinds of data? And what are the prospects that your approach would help us settle the question once and for all?

[(1) Some might argue that the realism of our assumptions is unimportant because all that really matters is predictive power. However, for purposes of this essay, assume that, *ceteris paribus*, realism is better than unrealism, and as such we should try to find out.]

2) Qualitative and Interpretive Methods

In recent years there has been considerable interest among scholars working within a positivist frame of reference in advancing qualitative methods as a tool for the study of world politics. By virtue of its emphasis on case studies and its focus on institutional and historical context the qualitative methods “movement” might seem – depending on your point of view – to bridge, co-opt, or marginalize the preferred methods of scholars who identify themselves as interpretivists.

Compare and contrast qualitative and interpretive methods. To what extent are the goals, techniques, and logics of inquiry of the two traditions similar, and how are they different? Are qualitative IR scholars interpretivists in all but name, or is positivism now so broad that there now no need for interpretivism? And what, if anything, might each side learn from the other?

PART C: POLICY

1) Talking to Bad Guys

Recently US presidential candidate Barack Obama suggested that we (the US) should “talk to bad guys” like North Korea and Iran if we want to influence their behavior in a positive direction. For this statement Obama has been criticized by many on the grounds that such talking would serve only to legitimate the position of dictators, and yield scant results for the US; instead, the US should continue the current policy of giving the bad guys the “silent treatment.” Set aside the specific context of this election campaign. Drawing on relevant IR scholarship and being mindful of counter-arguments, what is your view about the value of talking to adversaries, and why?

2) Coalitions of the Willing

The Bush Administration has championed the idea of “coalitions of the willing” when the UN fails to act against clear and present dangers. In Donald Rumsfeld’s words, we should let the mission define the coalition rather than let the coalition define the mission. No doubt partly in response to the failures in Iraq, this policy has been much criticized for failing to respect international law. Yet looking beyond Iraq Rumsfeld may have a point, particularly if the imperatives are moral. What if the conflict in Darfur were to significantly worsen, for example, and China blocked the UN from acting? Might not a coalition of the willing to intervene prevent a great deal of human suffering? Leaving this particular case to one side and drawing on relevant IR scholarship and real-world events, what is your view about how to balance international law and the desire to get moral things done, and why?