

International Relations

Unit 2 Focus Questions (Final version)

As a reminder, the second exam will pick up where the last exam left off (i.e., the unit exams are not comprehensive). **If there have been any changes to the guide after it is initially posted, those changes have been noted in bold font**

1. While realism is the dominant theory in IR, there are alternative theories that focus on the fact that states are now working together—especially with respect to trade and economic development—than ever before. The two main alternatives are liberalism and constructivism. What are the core assumptions of liberalism about how international politics works and how it is changing over time? Why do “liberals” (in the IR sense, not as used in US politics... be able to explain the difference) think that most countries want and will try to get along if they can? Why would liberals typically support working with another country even when the other country stands to gain more from the relationship?
2. Why do liberals think this century likely will be more peaceful than the last one? What are some of the reasons liberals think that democratic systems are less likely to be aggressive in international politics, especially toward one another (pay attention to Mingst’s ideas on democratic peace theory? Why do most IR liberals support having democracies trade and closely interact with authoritarian or totalitarian countries? (See especially the sections in the Mingst on Kant and “complex interdependence”)
3. What do liberals think about increasing the strength and reach of international organizations? What disagreements do liberals have among themselves when it comes to using force to build such institutions or to promote the spread of democracy and capitalism?
4. What are the core assumptions of constructivism about how international politics works and how it is changing over time? What does a “constructivist” mean when she says (as a famous one has) that “anarchy is what we make of it” (review what Mingst says about constructivism and “identities,” “discourse,” and “socialization”? If a constructivist is trying to predict the political behavior of states 50 years from now, where does s/he look for evidence? Constructivism will be covered by the next exam.
5. How do constructivists explain the fact that most states do not have nuclear weapons, and what factors would most likely lead states to start developing them? How does this differ from the answers a realist or liberal would give? Beyond the idea that “weapons of mass destruction” are different from other weapons and uniquely evil, what are some of the other big ideas that have developed over time to guide state behavior (e.g., “sovereignty,” “right to self-determination,” or “human rights”).
6. Drawing on the arguments advanced in Gwen Gwynne Dyer's documentary, "The Bomb Beneath the World" (1994), which we will watch in class, how has globalization impacted traditional Indian society and its culture? Are there any obvious benefits to the world's poor having increased access to mass-manufactured goods? Why does Dyer (and the critical/Marxist perspective in general) see globalization as inevitable? What specific problems does Dyer point in his assessment of globalization, and why does he think that it may not be all that bad (i.e., why does he hold out some hope that we can avoid environmental collapse over the long run)?

7. Looking at the data presented in class, how has global production (i.e., GDP per capita) changed since the 1950s (you don't need to know the numbers, but understand the direction and breadth of that change)? How equally is wealth distributed in the globe, and how is that changing? Is there any evidence to suggest that globalization is making the world vastly less equal economically? Should poor countries resist globalization on economic grounds?
8. Thomas Friedman (who you don't actually read) has argued that "globalization has become the new international system"? What exactly is globalization, and what are the defining features of this supposedly new global system? Why does Friedman think that the world has become permanently and irreversibly "flat" (the term he uses to describe the way that societies interact under globalization), and what does he think this means for the traditional role of the state and military power as the central factors of global politics? We will discuss these ideas in class, but the same concepts are covered in the John Green video and to some extent in the Dyer documentary.
9. Some of your course materials dispute Friedman's claim that globalization constitutes either an entirely new international system or that deeper economic and political integration is inevitable. How do social scientists measure the extent of globalization? What parts of the world are the most globalized and how globalized are they? To what extent do the guesses of informed individuals about the extent of globalization match up with reality?
10. Is there any reason to believe (see Ferguson) that globalization may be a temporary product of American power rather than a permanent, irreversible feature of intl. relations? What might make globalization go wither (specifically, how vulnerable is the technological infrastructure that undergirds globalization)? What evidence is there to suggest that state sovereignty may well remain extremely important for generations to come?
11. Still looking at Niall Ferguson's work, why has globalization faltered in previous historical periods, and what can the fall of Britain from great power status teach us about the role that powerful states play in sustaining or rolling back globalization? Are there any obvious parallels between the factors that led to Britain's rejection of globalization and politics in the United States more recently?
12. Some of your readings are a little less excited about globalization than Friedman, and there is considerable evidence that many voters in the advanced industrial democracies are concerned about the political and economic effects of globalization. What evidence do Fred Hu and Michael Spence provide to suggest that the positive effects of globalization are "stalling"?
13. The three major theories of IR—realism, liberalism, and constructivism—offer different ideas about when and why states will cooperate. What are the major assumptions of each theory concerning international cooperation and what kinds of international organizations states are likely to build when they choose to build them?
14. Why do states have a more difficult time cooperating in an anarchical international system that lacks a central government comparable to what we see within states? What is a "collective good"? What is "*the tragedy of the commons*?" What is "*the prisoner's dilemma*"? What do these ideas/concepts tell us about the nature and logic of collaboration? Why do social scientists think that fully rational groups of people will often behave in ways that end up harming everyone more than other possible choices would have? How safe is it to assume that humans or at least the social organizations we create will always cooperate if it is in everyone's best interest and the costs of not cooperating are very high?
15. Why is it so hard for countries to engage in collective action even in cases where it is in every country's best interests to work together? What variables and conditions are most helpful in

predicting when states will cooperate (e.g., the certainty of an outcome, whether those who won't help to secure a good can be excluded from it when the gain will be secured, the number—one, a few, or all—of states whose collaboration is required, which states must collaborate, etc.)

16. What is an international “regime,” and what are the main types of regimes? Building on the set of questions regarding collective action above, what kinds of situations are most likely to lead to the formation of an intl. regime? When do regimes often fail to form even when the world as a whole faces dire consequences from collective inaction?
17. What are the major roles played by the most formal type of intl. regime: “international governmental organizations”? Why are there so many more IGOs today than there used to be? What are the most influential financial (i.e., the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank) and security (i.e., the UN, the Security Council, NATO) IGOs, and what are their primary functions?
18. How prevalent and lethal is present-day warfare when compared to previous decades? How has war (especially the targeting of non-combatants and the use of weapons of mass destruction) changed during the 20th century and through recent international agreements?
19. Why do some scholars (IR liberals and constructivists believe that this century will be less violent than recent ones? Is there any evidence to suggest that a coherent network of intl. regimes has emerged that will reduce the frequency and scope of conflict during the next century?
20. Thinking about the issues and evidence highlighted in class slides and your reading from the Economist, why do some scholars and experts think that war may be more likely in the future than it has been for the last several decades? To what extent has the outbreak of major war in the past followed seemingly predictable cycles, and where are we in that cycle?
21. Thinking about where the international system is today (specifically, how stable US dominance is likely to remain over time) and the Vox reading on the current state of war, why do some scholars think that a war between the US and either China or Russia is more likely today than it was a decade or two ago? Why do many experts see technological innovation in weapons—especially military applications of artificial intelligence—as a development that could lead to more conflict in future years?
22. Based on the reading you were asked to look at the war in Ukraine (from the Council on Foreign Relations) as well as our many discussions in class, what were the main causes behind Russia's decision to invade Ukraine? What political and resource role did Ukraine play in the USSR before it broke up in the early 1990s, leaving its most powerful component—Russia—as the regional hegemon? Why does Russia think that it has legitimate reasons for seeing parts or even all of Ukraine as part of Russia? What, if anything, did the west do that played a role in Russia's decision to attack when it did and to then pivot to a full-scale invasion? Per class, what role has the structure of Russian politics and economics, Vladimir Putin's characteristics, and his assumptions about how likely it was the west would come together to defend Ukraine figure into the start of the war? Finally, why have things gone so poorly for Russia's invasion, and why would they likely face insurmountable problems occupying Ukraine over the long-run even if they were to eventually succeed in taking Kiev and replacing Ukraine's current government?
23. What is the main purpose of the United Nations, and to what extent has the UN been successful in advancing the core principles highlighted in its founding Charter? In what ways do the main goals of the Charter contradict one another? In practice, what does the UN do when it comes to protecting human values versus state sovereignty?

24. Based on the documentary film, *The Peacekeepers*, that you were asked to watch on the UN's involvement in the Congo's civil war, what were the strengths and limitations of the UN in that conflict? How much autonomy (capacity to act on its own with its own resources) does the UN have in its peacekeeping missions? Whose permission does it need to act? Where does it get funding for peacekeeping missions and what does it have to do to get that money? What about troops? How fair is it to criticize the UN for not doing more to stop wars?
25. What resources and options does the UN have at its command to protect and enhance international security? Under what conditions will the UN "authorize" the use of force against sovereign countries? When, how, and to what effect does the UN use its peacekeeping missions? What role do development and sanctions play in the UN's attempts to make the world more peaceful?
26. How successful has the UN been in limiting conflict? Where have the UN and the US differed in recent years concerning the priorities and purpose of the UN? Critics in the US complain that America's UN dues are expensive and counter to our interests since the UN's "General Assembly" frequently is used as a forum to critique US foreign policy. Based on your assigned readings, what are the counterarguments to these complaints?
27. What are the major proposals to reform the UN? Why is the present set-up of the "Security Council" so widely criticized, and how likely is it that its structure will be changed? Is there any upside to allowing a handful of countries to have permanent vetoes? What role does the US play on the UN "Security Council," and how does this institution enhance or detract from US foreign policy initiatives?