

Political Science 972: International Conflict
Optional Final Exam
Spring 2007

Administrative Details

This exam is optional: if you take the exam, it will count 15% towards your final grade. If not, that 15% will be distributed equally among the other three components (discussion, lit review, research paper) that determine your grade. The exam should be emailed to me by 4:30 on **Tuesday, 16 May**.

Instructions for this exam

You should answer *only two questions* on the exam. All of these questions are comparable to qualifying exam questions on the topic of international conflict; in fact some of these *are* actually qualifying exam questions. Your answers should be approximately six pages in length (double-spaced, not including the bibliography) [This is somewhat shorter than qualifying exam answers, which are designed to be answered in about ten pages.]

The following instructions are a standard part of qualifying exams in international relations and also apply to this exam

Advice to the students: A good exam is characterized by coherent and forceful arguments based on existing work and evidence in the field. A weak exam is one where the argument is made in isolation from the literature and/or where no argument is made. Almost all of the questions are designed to allow you to take a position on an issue. Do so, and don't simply produce an annotated bibliography. In other words, use the questions to show that you both know the material and can present an argument as a scholar.

Examinations should demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of the field. Relevant real world examples should be integrated and important recent published literature should be cited. [Note: in this exam, I am not expecting you to go beyond the required readings in this course, though you should feel free to include other material. In an actual qualifying exam, you are expected to also know the relevant recent literature not included in any syllabus.]

Questions: Answer only two

1. Studies of international conflict usually sample from a broad span of history—typically the post-Napoleonic period (e.g., the Correlates of War project), and some times even the post-medieval period (e.g., the "long cycle" studies). Implicit in such designs is the assumption that the phenomenon of "war" is sufficiently consistent over a long period of time as to make generalizations about war valid even when they span centuries. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of that proposition: you should feel free to argue that some aspects of the phenomenon are consistent across time and that others are not.

2. "If states were truly rational, war would never occur." Discuss.

3. Using Olson and Mehlum et al as a starting point, agree or disagree (or rather, “discuss”): “The level of militarized political organization cannot go below a certain level, since as the power of the state weakens, alternative militarized non-state actors will quickly arise to fill the gap and restore some semblance of order. The result of a ‘state failure’ is not chaos but simply a decentralization of power.” You should also feel free to bring in any relevant literature from other coursework you have done, for example in comparative politics, but keep the focus on *militarized* actors, not political development in general.

4. “Some people have argued that the on-going evaluation of the ‘democratic peace’ hypothesis is one of the most important contributions that has been made by international relations theory in the past fifty years. Others feel that if they see one more paper on democratic peace, they’ll puke.¹ Take a position on one side or the other of this issue.” [The particular phrasing of this question is courtesy of one of my colleagues but the characterization of the debate is decidedly accurate...]

5. What are the possible linkages between war and large-scale organized political activity found in civilized societies. In particular, what are the arguments for and against these two extreme positions:

- The institution of war was fundamental to the development and maintenance of civilization;
- War is a relic of pre-civilized times and is a major threat to civilization;

More generally, to what extent does organized violence (both the preparations for and implementations of) determine the political and social structures of a society in general? To what extent do the economic structures and technology determine the organization of violence? Have there been key turning points in history where the answers to these questions changed; what has caused those? Be sure to discuss this in the context of the academic literature and arguments; don’t just give your own opinion.

6. To what extent is modern realism—the version that arose in the 1940s as a response to the failures of idealism—actually based in the earlier literature (Thucydides, etc), and to what extent is it at actually a new theory tuned to 20th century circumstances that, like any adept aspirant to a throne, claimed nonetheless to have an ancient pedigree? More generally, why does almost 2000 years pass between the earliest realist writers (Sun-Tzu and Thucydides) to where it was picked up by Machiavelli and Hobbes. What does this say about realism as a universal description of human behavior? Or did we just happen to have 2000 years of idiots?

7. Assess the proposition of whether low intensity conflict (LIC) is or is not significantly different from the conventional conflicts between states that I call “Clausewitzian.”. By “significantly different”, I mean that a theory or model developed on a set of cases of Clausewitzian conflict would be misleading if applied to LIC. Consider specifically the following possible sources of difference:

¹ Translation of this sentence to conventional academic English: “Others feel that the topic of democratic peace has been studied excessively, there is nothing to be learned from further study, and attempts to do so do not enhance the quality of academic life.”

- The scale of the conflict in terms of the number of combatants and the length of time the conflict continues. Also the asymmetry of the two or more "sides."
- The absence of sovereign political authority on at least one side
- The causes of the conflict and, usually closely related, the objectives of the antagonists
- The inter-mixing of military and civilians
- The strategies and tactics typically employed by the antagonists

(Note that the various authors we have read have quite different opinions on this issue. Also note that the LIC category itself may be incorrectly lumping together several different types of behavior.)

8. To what extent are we currently seeing a reversal of the Westphalian transition which concentrated first legitimate political power, and by the twentieth century almost all military power, into centralized states. Specifically address the effects of:

- a. Globalization and decentralization of significant military power (automatic weapons, high explosives) to the level where a relatively small group can once again challenge, at least locally, even a major power
- b. Globalization and decentralization of economic power to the extent that has very significantly diminished both the ability of any sovereign to control its own economy, and removed many of the advantages of sovereignty That is, a city-state such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai or Qatar can play a major role in the world economy, and a continental power such as Russia does not necessarily have major advantages. Territorial size no longer is important.

Will these changes lead to a political decentralization similar to the European high Middle Ages or have other changes -- for example in communications and non-military technology -- locked the system into a different path?

9. Evaluate the concept Blainey calls the "Manchester thesis" Why did it prove to be so incorrect at the time? Might it be correct now, in the 21st century, even though it wasn't at the beginning of the 20th. How does the Manchester thesis compare with contemporary "liberal peace" theorists, notably Thomas Friedman? How does the Manchester thesis compare with the democratic peace thesis (which is a large collection of literature, so the more general question is what is the extent of the overlap between the two?)

10. Suppose you wanted to translate the approaches in Petraeus and the FM3-24 counter-insurgency manual into political science theory. To what extent is this approach supported by various theoretical approaches and empirical research programs in political science; to what extent does it provide new ideas not found in our theories; to what extent does what we know from political science theory and research contradict this approach. How similar is the Petraeus et al critique of past US failures, notably Vietnam, Lebanon and Somalia, consistent with the academic critiques?

11. What is the linkage between human conflict on the *individual* level (as expressed in biological and psychological theories) or the *group* level (as expressed in anthropological theories) and the highly organized, pre-meditated political activity of *war* as expressed in bureaucratic and state-centered theories? Same question for lethal *violence* (as distinct from conflict) at those sub-political levels? To what extent is war a cooperative rather than a conflictual activity?