

# International Relations Exam – January 2024

## Theory

- Some scholars argue that international law specifically, and international institutions more generally, are more likely to serve the strong rather than the weak, since great powers have the greatest influence over the design of international rules and the greatest capacity to both deploy and evade them. Others contend that interacting with stronger powers in a legalistic or institutionalist domain allows weaker powers to level the playing field. Where do you stand on this debate?
- What are the most convincing explanations for why states go to war? Theoretically speaking, are the causes of interstate war fundamentally different than the causes of civil wars?

## Methods

- History seems to suggest that declining powers often clash with the rising powers trying to eclipse them. Many pundits—and scholars—take this to imply that the United States and China are on a collision course. Suggest a research design to test the hypothesis that the risk of war between two great powers goes up during periods of power transition. In your response, be sure to address whether or not you think such a research design will also help us assess the risk of war between the United States and China.
- Recently, many scholars have turned their attention to the individual level of analysis, especially but not only in the form of experimental studies. What advances in IR scholarship have been made possible by focusing on the psychology of individuals, their emotions, and preexisting beliefs? Conversely, what are the drawbacks of this “behavioral revolution” for IR?

## Topics

- The canonical theories of nuclear deterrence were developed in a bipolar world. Can U.S. policymakers still rely on them in today’s increasingly multipolar security environment? Why and/or why not?
- At one end of the spectrum, certain institutions devoted to trade and finance, such as the WTO or IMF, have memberships that span the entire globe. By contrast, other regimes, such as arms control or technology sharing agreements, are often institutionalized by as few as two countries. Where on this spectrum

does the problem of climate change lie? What types of institutions and regimes are best suited to tackling this global threat?