Randall Schweller

Randall Schweller is Professor of Political Science at The Ohio State University. His research focuses on theories of world politics and international security.

Schweller is the author of *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton University Press, 2006) and *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (Columbia University Press, 1998), and has publications in journals such as *World Politics, International Studies Quarterly, American Political Science Review, Review of International Studies,* and *Security Studies.*

Schweller approaches international politics from the theoretical perspective of a neo-classical realist. Realists believe that state behavior in the international playing field is primarily motivated by the desire for power and security, rather than by ideals or ethics.

Neo-classical realists believe that foreign policy is an outcome of the position of states in the international system and the domestic factors that limit each state, such as material resources. They focus on explaining the foreign policy actions of individual states.

In his book *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power,* Schweller explores the phenomenon of “underbalancing” from a neo-classical perspective. When states fail to recognize dangerous threats, choose not to react to them, or respond in imprudent ways, they are considered to be underbalancing.

This behavior directly contradicts a core tenet of mainstream realism — that states confronted by dangerous threats act to restore the disrupted balance by creating alliances or increasing their military capabilities, or, in some cases, a combination of both.

Schweller concludes that countries most likely to underbalance are incoherent, fragmented states whose elites are constrained by political considerations. He argues that a country's decision to balance is based on four variables:

- Elite consensus about the nature and extent of the threat
- Elite cohesion, or the degree of internal division in the central government’s leadership
- Social cohesion, or the degree of internal division among a country’s citizens
• Regime or government vulnerability to political opposition

Schweller theorizes that threatened states rating highly along these four dimensions will balance more effectively than those with lower ratings. Case studies of interwar France and Britain confirm his hypothesis. Both countries ranked low in Schweller’s four variables, and neither created alliances quickly enough to prevent Germany’s gain of power.

In his current research, Schweller explores the application of entropy, the second law of thermodynamics, to international relations. Entropy can be described as the tendency for all matter and energy in the universe to evolve toward a state of inert uniformity.

By applying entropy to international relations, Schweller examines the ways political systems tend to degrade into “most probable” patterns, as the various units of the system engage in random, disordered activity. An example of how political systems are degrading toward patterned uniformity today is globalization, which captures an array of phenomena driven by uncoordinated, stateless actors.

Schweller hopes to use the concept of entropy to explain the evolution of the international system and other political phenomena, such as the relatively disorganized alliance dynamics under the current international leadership of the United States.