

Schweller, Randall. "Neorealism's Status Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1996) 90-121.

Bumper sticker: There is no security dilemma—predatory states are the source of conflict.

Waltz argues that Balance of Power politics is a result of 1) anarchy and 2) a desire for self-preservation. Schweller counters that these are not sufficient—if there has never been a threat in such a system, there is no need to balance. He notes that neorealists like Waltz do not state that 3) predatory states must exist to trigger the security dilemma. Why not? Waltz tries to avoid characterizing states because he believes unit-level explanations are reductionist. If some states are predatory and others are not, the explanation for their behavior may lie in the characterization of the state and not in the nature of the system.

The concept of the "true interests" of the state have changed over time:

- 1) Greed (from Machiavelli through the era of power politics)
- 2) Cultural hegemony (early 19th century – Cousin, Hegel)
- 3) Living space (late 19th century – Darwinian arguments)
- 4) Status Quo/Revisionist (early postwar period – Morgenthau, Schuman, Kissinger, Carr, Mattern, Wolfers) – Note that here there are **two** kinds of states. Status Quo states seek to maintain the international system and try to make other states feel more secure. Revisionist states seek to "revise" the international system (i.e. change their position in the current system) and try to make other states feel less secure.
- 5) Security (today – Waltz, Buzan) – states seek to acquire the minimum power necessary to gain security and thus focus on defense rather than offense. Note that this is different from power-maximization.

Today's realists argue that states accumulate power only to achieve security. Why? Because nonsecurity power accumulation will be met with expansion or new alliances by other states in order to eliminate the change in relative power. But underlying this argument is the assumption that "states value more what they have than what they covet." This assumption is reasonable for many states, but not all.

Waltz's assumption, that the primary interest of all states is security, reflects a status-quo bias. Of course, status quo states that are satisfied with their position in the international system will seek first to maintain their position. However, revisionist states that are not satisfied may prefer to revise their position in the system prior to maintaining security. These states may be willing to trade off security for power.

Schweller points out that competition for power is a zero sum game in which relative gains are important. Thus it resembles a Prisoner's Dilemma game, and conflict always arises. On the other hand, competition for security is a variable sum game because absolute gains may be important (one state's increase in security may improve another's). This is better modeled as a Stag Hunt game in which cooperation is possible. But it only takes the presence of one power-maximizing state to induce conflict. "When the goal of one or more states is something other than mutual security...conflict arises not because they misperceive the security efforts of benign states but because aggressive states truly wish to harm them." (104)

Implications:

- 1) This logic supports the theory of bandwagoning over balance. Revisionist states will be willing to side with states calling for a New Order, even if those states are stronger than the status quo coalition (e.g. Eastern European states bandwagon with U.S. in 1989).
- 2) The concept of defensive-positionality (states maintain sufficient relative power to achieve security) fails. Schweller notes that this goal accurately characterizes status quo states, but not revisionist states. A state that seeks to accumulate power may want to enter several bilateral arrangements in which it gains relatively less than its partners because if the partners do not enter into agreements with one another, it will actually increase its total power. (See 112 for a numerical example).
- 3) The goal of revisionist states is described more accurately by the neoliberal conception of states as rational egoists who maximize absolute gains. But the motive is to expand power, a distinctly realist notion.
- 4) The security dilemma does not exist. If states intend to expand, then they are maximizing power, not security. If they don't, then there is no threat to security. The so-called dilemma thus rests on misperception of state intentions, which contradicts the realist argument that conflicts of interest are genuine and not the result of misunderstanding.