

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Neoclassical Realism and Foreign Policy Analysis

The theoretical framework follows a neoclassical realist approach that treats power as the central variable in the analysis of cross-strait relations and Taiwan's policy toward China in IGOs. The realist view of cross-strait relations in IGOs reflects the basic assumption of this book that IGOs seem unlikely to encourage cooperation between Taiwan and China since power politics and sovereignty disputes have clearly prevailed over functional considerations. Cross-strait relations in international organizations have always been a matter of *realpolitik* and high politics. Thus, the key to understanding the triangular relationship between Taiwan, China and IGOs is to be found in the distribution of power and in the general state of the bilateral political relationship between Taiwan and China.

Realism is first and foremost a philosophical world view that regards the power struggle among groups as a constant feature of international politics and is pessimistic about the prospects of world peace. It has a long tradition, and includes works by Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. While there are numerous divisions in the realist paradigm, at least four realist core assumptions shared by all realists can be identified (Walt 2002; Schweller and Priess 1997). First, individuals are members of groups and act in groups. Because groups are usually organized in the form of nation-states, states are regarded as the most important actors in international politics. Second, anarchy is the main characteristic of the international system. In contrast to inner state systems, the absence of a central authority creates an international self-help system, in which states are responsible for their own security. Third, power is the key variable in realist theory and is placed at the center of all political life. States need power in order to pursue their interests, their most fundamental goal being their survival and security in the anarchical international system. Fourth, the nature of international politics is essentially conflictual and characterized by struggle for power among groups.

There are two outstanding realist theories: classical or traditional realism (Morgenthau 1961, Carr 1949; Herz 1951) and structural realism or neo-realism (Waltz 1979, Mearsheimer 2001). Classical realism, led by Hans J. Morgenthau, emerged shortly after World War II and emphasized the will to power as an inte-

gral part of human nature. Classical realists put forward a set of principles on the nature of international politics and included the individual level, domestic politics and the international system in their analysis. Interests defined in terms of power were regarded as central to a state's foreign policy that can vary greatly, however, and has to be seen in a historical, political and cultural context. Neo-realism, introduced by Kenneth N. Waltz (1979), built on many of the assumptions of classical realism and transformed them into a theory of international politics. The main difference between classical realism and neo-realism is the different emphasis placed on the structure of the international system. While Morgenthau's main work "Politics Among Nations" introduced a realist approach to international politics that jumped between different levels of analysis, Waltz located his extremely parsimonious "Theory of International Politics" solely at the systemic level. The ultimate objective of Waltz's theory is to explain patterns and outcomes of international behavior such as the polarity, balance of power and alliance behavior in the international system. In contrast to the classical realists, Waltz did not locate the source of conflict primarily in human nature and power-seeking individuals, but pointed to the anarchic structure of the international system to explain the recurrence of conflicts.

According to Waltz, the international system is composed of a structure and units (states). Due to the anarchic nature of the international system and the lack of a central authority, states are permanently confronted with insecurity, because "many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others" (Jervis 1978: 169). States are constantly confronted with this so-called security dilemma, because they can never be sure about the intentions of other states. Because "today's friend may be tomorrow's enemy in war" (Grieco 1990: 29), states always have to perceive other states as potential threats and find themselves in a permanent state of security competition. To ensure their own survival, states often tend to increase their power, the central variable in realist theory, and are primarily interested in their relative power position in the international system vis-à-vis the other states. Thus, in realist theory, the distribution of relative power and material capabilities in the international system are the key factors in explaining international outcomes.

For the purpose of theory-building, Waltz conceptualized states as unitary actors that differ in their material capabilities. Neo-realists agree with the importance of domestic variables in a state's foreign policy, but argue that reality needs to be simplified in order to provide a universal theory of international politics and therefore treat states as black boxes. Waltz (1979: 71-72) explained that international politics focusing on the system and foreign policy include different levels of analysis and pointed out that a theory of international politics

“can tell us what pressures are exerted and what possibilities are posed by systems of different structure, but it cannot tell us just how, and how effectively, the units of a system will respond to those pressures and possibilities. (...) We cannot predict how they will react to the pressures without knowledge of their internal dispositions. (...) An international-political theory does not imply or require a theory of foreign policy any more than a market theory implies or requires a theory of the firm.”

Although neo-realism has also frequently been employed as an approach to the study of foreign policy (Elman 1996, Rynning and Guzzini 2001; Rittberger 2004, Wivel 2005), Waltz (ibid: 118) has often stressed that his theory of international politics cannot account for or explain the foreign policies of states and offered a wide range of choices for state behavior when pointing out that states “at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination”. He (ibid.: 118) argued that states might react differently and even irrationally to systemic requirements, but contended that in this case, they are likely to suffer. Waltz (1996: 57) explained:

“Under most circumstances, a theory of international politics is not sufficient, and cannot be made sufficient, for the making of unambiguous predictions. An international political theory can explain states’ behavior only when external pressures dominate the internal disposition of states, which seldom happens. When they do not, a theory of international politics needs help.”

As a result of the inability of neo-realism to provide an adequate explanation of foreign policy behavior, neoclassical realism emerged in the 1990s as a new theoretical framework for the analysis of foreign policy, built on both classical and structural realism (Schweller 2003). Neoclassical realism was introduced into the academic world by Gideon Rose (1998) in his article “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy” published in *World Politics*. Referring to studies by Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (Eds.) (1995), Thomas J. Christensen (1996), Randall L. Schweller (1998), William Curti Wohlforth (1993) and Fareed Zakaria (1998) that all discussed the grand strategies of great powers, Rose identified a common research program among these studies. He argued that these studies are based on the realist assumption of the importance of anarchy and the distribution of relative power in the international system, but they also assert that domestic-level variables must be included for the thorough analysis of the grand strategies of the great powers. The inclusion of unit-level factors that function as intervening variables to explain the relationship between the relative power distribution in the international system (independent variable) and the actual foreign policies of states (dependent varia-

ble) in their neorealist analyses prompted Rose to coin a term for a new school of neoclassical realism, which he (*ibid.*: 146) defined as follows:

“It explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical.”

Neoclassical realism shares the basic assumptions of classical realism and neorealism that the implication of anarchy, the distribution of power and the position of states in the international system are the most important variables in explaining political outcomes. The main difference between these research programs is that neoclassical realism advocates opening the black box of the state and systematically connects structural and unit-level variables in its analysis (Table 1).

*Table 1:* Classical Realism, Neo-Realism, and Neoclassical Realism

Research program	Epistemology and methodology	View of the international system	View of the units	Dependent variable	Underlying causal logic
CLASSICAL REALISM	Inductive theories; philosophical reflection on nature of politics or detailed historical analysis (generally drawn from W. European history)	Somewhat important	Differentiated	Foreign policies of states	Power distributions or distribution of interests (revisionist vs. status quo) → foreign policy
NEOREALISM	Deductive theories; competitive hypothesis testing using qualitative and sometimes quantitative methods	Very important; inherently competitive and uncertain	Undifferentiated	International political outcomes	Relative power distributions (independent variable) → international outcomes (dependent variable)
NEOCLASSICAL REALISM	Deductive theorizing; competitive hypothesis testing using qualitative methods	Important; implications of anarchy are variable and sometimes opaque to decision-makers	Differentiated	Foreign policies of states	Relative power distributions (independent variable) → domestic constraints and elite perceptions (intervening variables) → foreign policy (dependent variable)

Source: Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009: 20.

Neoclassical realism can be regarded as an extension of neo-realism reacting to the inadequacy of structural realism to explain “why state X made a certain move last Tuesday” (Waltz 1979: 121). It basically agrees with neo-realism that the foreign policies of states are likely to follow the imperatives set by the distribution of power in the international system in the long term, but argues that they often undergo changes that might well differ from the predictions of a balance-of-power theory based on an analysis at the systemic level. Neoclassical realism assumes that the explanations for foreign policy changes can be found in the internal composition of states and in the perceptions of state leaders, thus incorporating all three images of international relations in its analysis. The state and complex domestic processes are positioned between the international system and foreign policy outcomes and posit “an imperfect ‘transmission belt’ between systemic incentives and constraints, on the one hand, and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies states select, on the other” (Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009: 4). An analysis of this transmission belt can help to explain why states pursue a certain foreign policy and whether their actions are motivated by systemic or domestic motivations, or by a mixture of these. Schweller (2003: 320) pointed out that “neoclassical realists explore the “internal processes” by which states “arrive at policies and decide on actions” in response to the pressures and opportunities in their external environment”. State leaders and foreign policy executives are regarded as Janus-faced and positioned at the intersection of the international and the domestic levels.

In his review article, Rose primarily discussed the two intervening variables of perception and misperception on the one hand and a state’s ability to extract and direct domestic resources on the other. In this way, Rose carved out two central questions for neoclassical realist analysis: firstly, whether the state, or more precisely the leaders that act on behalf of the state, have the *willingness* to react to systemic constraints and incentives and, secondly, whether they have the *ability* to do so. According to Zakaria (1998: 9):

“Foreign policy is made not by the nation as a whole but by its government. Consequently, what matters is state power, not national power. State power is that portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decision-makers can achieve their ends.”

States are expected to deviate from systemic incentives when domestic constraints interfere. Hence, the material capabilities of states are important, but become even more important if state leaders are able and willing to transform these capabilities into actual power. Because states do not necessarily have the unconstrained ability to extract national power and mobilize resources, neoclassical realists generally take a much more skeptical position on the measurability

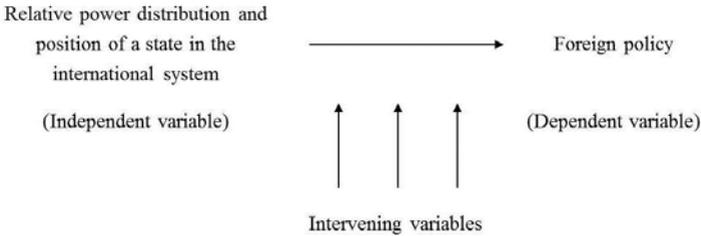
of power. Wohlforth (1993: 306-307) described the difficulties in evaluating power:

“Power cannot be tested; different elements of power possess different utilities at different times; the relation of perceived power to material resources can be capricious; the mechanics of power are surrounded by uncertainty; states possess different conversion ratios and comparative advantages; the perceived prestige hierarchy and the military distribution may not coincide for prolonged periods; states adopt asymmetrical strategies to maximize their positions and undercut rivals; signals get confused among allies, rivals, and domestic audiences.”

Neoclassical realist studies usually employ a methodological approach consisting of case studies, historical and analytical narratives, and the identification of causal mechanisms between causes and outcomes (process tracing). Neoclassical realists have introduced a wide variety of intervening variables, but have deliberately refrained from determining how many of these should be incorporated in a study and how they should be ranked in importance. Scholars are advised to select variables for themselves according to their research questions and their knowledge of the specific state. Intervening variables provided by neoclassical realist studies can so far be grouped in four main categories (Figure 3): the state's structure and domestic competition (measuring the ability of a state to pursue a certain policy) as well as perception and identity (measuring the willingness of a state to pursue a certain policy).

By connecting systemic and unit-level variables, neoclassical realism functions as a bridging theory to other non-realist research programs that primarily focus on domestic level explanations such as preference formation (liberalism) or ideas and identities (constructivism). During recent decades, an increasing number of scholars has called for the inclusion of unit level variables in the study of international conflict and cooperation (*inter alia*: Putnam 1988; Evans, Jacobson and Putnam 1993; Snyder 1996; Milner 1997; Sterling-Folker 1997). The essential difference between neoclassical realism and other non-realist research programs is the underlying assumption of the primary importance of power distribution in the international system as the point of origin for research. Domestic factors have always been a part of realist thought (Feaver et al. 2000) but were disregarded in the predominant version of structural realism for the sake of theory-building. Although domestic variables are included in the neoclassical realist analysis, power is considered *primus inter pares*, as the variable that is most likely to determine a state's long-term policy and to impact significantly on its short to medium term policies.

Figure 3: Variables in Neoclassical Realism



Intervening variables affecting a state's *ability*:

- State structure (organizational structure, state-society autonomy, decision-making process, administrative competence, regime vulnerability)
- Domestic competition (elite consensus, party competition, elections, public opinion and support, social cohesion)

Intervening variables affecting a state's *willingness*:

- Perception (perception of power distribution, threat perception)
- Identities (elite belief systems, ideas, nationalism, ideology)

Criticism of neoclassical realism has centered on two aspects (Legro and Moravcsik 1999; Moravcsik 2003: 189-196; Vasquez 1997; Vasquez 2003: 440-450): firstly, domestic level variables have simply been incorporated in an *ad hoc* manner and then used to explain away the anomalies of structural realism. Secondly, neoclassical realism has been accused of lacking the parsimony and precision in predictive power that allow the falsification of hypotheses. The degenerating realist paradigm, it was argued, has failed to form a set of distinct realist hard-core assumptions because of the large number of variables borrowed from other research paradigms, which were treated as if they were more important than power. Much of this criticism, however, has been directed at realism as a theoretical paradigm, and has failed to acknowledge that neoclassical realism is merely a theoretical framework for the detailed analysis of a state's foreign policy. Anders Wivel (2005: 374) pointed out that

“realist foreign policy analysis is not an either/or choice between rigorous theoretical parsimony and empirically rich case studies. Instead, realist foreign policy analysis should ideally proceed in stages from the parsimonious and highly general starting point in structural realism to the rich case studies allowing us to explain the specific foreign policy of individual countries.”

That is to say, the lack of parsimony is intended to increase its explanatory power. Rose (1998: 168) explained that

“neoclassical realism has compensating advantages, particularly in the opportunities it offers for building satisfying comprehensive explanations of foreign policy without abandoning the theory's core assumptions. Its very looseness, in other words, makes it a useful framework for carrying out the kind of midrange theorizing that so often is the best social science can hope to achieve.”

Much of the criticism is based on the false assumption that neo-realism would assume that states always react rationally to the constraints and incentives of the international system. The treating of states as black boxes is driven by the need for theory-building, but this does not imply that the domestic level is ignored or even denied in the realist paradigm (ibid.: 56; Sterling-Folker 1997: 16). In contrast, Waltz (1996: 56) pointed out that the difference between his theory of international politics and foreign policy analysis is that a theory includes little, while an analysis includes much, and he strongly advised examining the national and personal levels in order to find an explanation for foreign policy.

Nevertheless, although neo-realism is a systemic theory that explains constraints and incentives for states rather than their foreign policy, it still has a lot to say about the parameters and motivations of the actions of states. Rathbun (2008: 311-318) suggested using a neoclassical realist framework particularly in cases in which the foreign policy behavior of a state fails to respond rationally to systemic pressures, because the reasons for this deviation are most likely to be found in domestic politics and ideas. He described ideal state behavior as conforming with the unitary state actor model and objectivity premises of neo-realism and identified two unit-level reasons for the non-compliance of states with this ideal type of behavior: firstly, when states do not pursue their national interests due to narrower interests and, secondly, when ideas constitute a socially constructed reality that differs fundamentally from the neo-realist reality. In this sense, neoclassical realism can be regarded as a “theory of mistakes” (Schweller 2006: 10) that distinguishes between the ideal and the actual foreign policy behavior and can demonstrate that the international system punishes states that do not react effectively to systemic pressures.

Others do not agree, however, that neoclassical realism should only be used to explain foreign policies that are contrary to the ideal behavior predicted by an international system theory. Thomas Juneau (2010: 7 and 15) pointed out that neoclassical realism is best understood as a modest approach that offers a theoretically-inspired framework, “providing the tools for a conceptual analysis linking variables together and proposing a menu of candidate variables” and allowing “some level of systematization and rigor, within specific bonds, while re-

specting the complexity of international life”. Most scholars employ a broader approach that views neoclassical realism as a set of tools for explaining foreign policy riddles or for analyzing and explaining the policy of a particular state.

The strength of a neoclassical realist framework lies in the problem-driven approach that maintains a focus on the “political” in the study of international politics in order to enhance explanatory power (Ripsmann, Taliaferro and Lobell 2009: 298-299). This is precisely the aim of this book. The primary objective is to analyze and explain Taiwan’s policy toward China in IGOs with the help of the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism. At the same time, a secondary objective is to contribute to a better theoretical understanding of cross-strait relations and neoclassical realism by generating explanations of the neoclassical realist set of variables including when and how they can account for foreign policy behavior and changes.

## **2.2 The Role of International Organizations in Realist Theory**

The number of international governmental organizations, defined by Margaret P. Karns and Karen A. Mingst (2004: 7) as “organizations whose members include at least three states, that have activities in several states, and whose members are held together by a formal intergovernmental agreement”, grew steadily until the mid-1980s (Table 2). Since then, although the number of IGOs has been declining, the number of emanations from existing IGOs has grown enormously, resulting in more complex organizations with more members and a greater range of functions (Pevehouse, Nordstrom and Warnke 2004). In 2008, the authoritative Yearbook of International Organization counted 247 conventional international intergovernmental organizations and 1705 other international intergovernmental bodies worldwide.

The rise of IGOs has often been explained by referring to the high degree of interdependence between states and the increasing need for global governance and cooperation in issues such as terrorism, climate change, diseases and the proliferation of weapons that can quickly move beyond national boundaries. IGOs differ greatly in their goals, size, openness to membership and scope of action. They can provide a forum that allows states to address issues of common concern through a collective decision-making process; reduce transaction costs; enable functional cooperation, communication and bargaining; collect and provide information; create and monitor rules; pool resources; observe trends; set standards; function as arbiters; and settle disputes (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Archer 2001: 68-110). IGOs have been conceptualized in three categories: as instruments for states to pursue their foreign policy interests, as arenas for bilat-

eral and multilateral diplomacy, negotiations and decisions, and as independent actors, which implies that states have delegated their sovereignty and that the organization has become a corporate actor.

*Table 2:* Number of Conventional IGOs and NGOs by Selected Years (1909-2008)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Conventional IGOs</b>	<b>Number of Conventional NGOs</b>
1909	37	176
1951	123	832
1964	179	1470
1972	280	2173
1978	289	2420
1985	378	4676
1987	311	4235
1989	300	4621
1991	297	4620
1995	266	5121
2000	243	6357
2004	246	7306
2008	247	8003

Source: Data compiled from UIA undated and UIA 2009/10: 1721.

International organizations certainly matter (Keohane 1984), but there is disagreement among realists as to the degree. From a neo-realist point of view, international organizations, usually embedded in a broader debate on institutions, are regarded as epiphenomenal to power relations as well as to state interests and are thus of minor importance (Zangl and Rittberger 2006: 14-24). Pointing to the implications of anarchy and the distribution of power in the international system, most neo-realists adopt a pessimistic view of the capability of institutions, because “international institutions are shaped and limited by the states that found and sustain them and have little independent effect” (Waltz 2000: 18). Waltz maintained that institutions are used by states as instruments to serve their own interests and that their effectiveness ultimately depends on the intentions of the most powerful states. Similarly, John J. Mearsheimer (1994/95: 7) adopted a dismissive position on institutions and concluded, in response to the liberal claim that institutions cause peace, that institutions “have minimal influence on state behavior, and thus hold little promise for promoting stability in the post-Cold War world”. In general, realism favors the view of institutions as instruments of states or as arenas for bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, but not as auto-



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