INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS – PRINCIPALS OR AGENTS? INTERPARADIGM DEBATE BETWEEN NEOLIBERALS AND REALISTS

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Abstract. The role of international organizations becomes especially acute when nation-states cannot establish consensus with regard to local, regional and global issues. Considering that international organizations are made of members with varying power dynamics, there is often criticism that they represent the interests of power actors and not a true consensus-building platform that would enable solving collective issues. The schools of realism and neoliberalism in the framework of International Relations attribute various roles to international organizations (IOs); while the first regard them as mere instruments of nation-states, the latter views them as crucial international players with autonomous status. This article critically evaluates various issues related to the efficiency and design of international institutions in the framework of this interparadigm debate and with consideration of the UN as a prime example. The analysis illustrates that further research in the field of IOs is imperative for both theoretical model-

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building as well as practical developments in the field. Finding suitable models is a vital concern for all international organizations, regardless of their purpose, size and origin.

ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ ҰЙЫМДАР – ЖЕТЕКШІ МЕ ӘЛДЕ ЖЕТЕКТЕГІ МЕ? НЕОЛИБЕРАЛДАР МЕН РЕАЛИСТЕРДІҢ ТЕОРИЯЛЫҚ БӨГЕТТЕРІ

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Аңдатпа. Жаһандық немесе жергілікті проблемаларды шешудегі халықаралық ұйымдардың рөлі ұлттық мемлекеттер келісімге келе алмаған кезде өте жоғары. Бірақ әрбір халықаралық ұйым әртүрлі салмақтар мен мүдделердің қатысушыларынан тұратындықтан, оның әрекеттері жеке ойыншылардың мүдделеріне бағындырылуы мүмкін, таразыны компромисстік шешімге емес, субъективтілікке қарай аударады. Осыны ескере отырып, халықаралық ұйымдар теориясындағы екі үлкен теориялық бағыттың сарапшылары – неолибералдық және реалистік – халықаралық ұйымның мақсаттары мен міндеттерін ескере отырып, оның бастапқы құрылымын қалыптастырудың әртүрлі құралдарын ұсынады. Егер неолибералдар халықаралық ұйымдарды халықаралық аренадағы тәуелсіз субъектілер деп санаса, реалисттер оларды тек ұлттық мемлекеттердің мүдделерінің агенттері ретінде қарастырады. Бұл мақалада теориялық ойдың одан әрі даму бағытын анықтау үшін (көп жағдайда БҰҰ мысалында) екі лагерьдің көзқарастарындағы негізгі айырмашылықтарды қорытындылауға тырысады. Қорытындылай келе, кез келген деңгейлер мен міндеттердің халықаралық ұйымдар жұмысында әмбебап идеялар мен оларды жүзеге асыру механизмдерін іздеу қажеттілігі туралы қорытындылар жасалады.

Түйін сөздер: *БҰҰ, халықаралық ұйымдар, ұтымды дизайн, неолиберализм, реализм.*

МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ - ВЕДУЩИЕ ИЛИ ВЕДОМЫЕ? ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЕ БАРРИКАДЫ НЕОЛИБЕРАЛОВ И РЕАЛИСТОВ

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Аннотация. Роль международных организаций в разрешении глобальных или локальных проблем проявляется особенно остро в периоды, когда национальные государства не могут прийти к согласию. Но поскольку каждая международная организация состоит из различных по весу и интересам участников, ее действия

могут подчиняться интересам отдельных игроков, склоняя чашу весов в сторону субъективного, а не компромиссного решения. Ввиду этого, эксперты от двух самых крупных теоретических направление теории международных организаций – неолиберального и реалистского – предлагают различные инструменты для формирования изначальной структуры международной организации с учетом ее целей и задач. Если неолибералы считают МО самостоятельными акторами на международной арене, то реалисты видят их исключительно проводниками интересов национальных государств. В данной статье предпринимается попытка суммировать ключевые различия во взглядах двух лагерей с тем (во многом, на примере ООН), чтобы определить дальнейшее направление развития теоретической мысли. В заключении приводятся выводы о необходимости поиска универсальных идей и механизмов для имплементации их в работу МО любых уровней и задач.

Ключевые слова: *ООН, международные организации, рациональный дизайн, неолиберализм, реализм.*

Introduction

There is some consensus among experts in international relations theory that the concept of the League of Nations failed because of its inability to prevent World War II. Its ideological successor, the United Nations (UN), was created on the basis of past experience, and was intended to serve not merely as a common forum for discussion, but as an effective mechanism for preventing armed conflict. To achieve its goal, the UN, unlike the League of Nations, must have the necessary authority and resources to exercise a *de facto* dictatorship to prevent war at its most tense moments. But even good intentions throughout the UN's 76-year history raise legitimate questions: "What power should be given to the UN and any other international organization? What should be the effective structure of the organization to achieve its goals? How should the balance of power and trust of the players be ensured?".

The multiple questions of operation and power definition cover not only the UN, but also other international organizations (IOs), from the European Union to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Each mechanism-voting, legal framework, authority, autonomy, funding is the cause of extensive debate among theorists and practitioners of international relations.

The main debate is between the proponents of the largest theoretical trends - realist and neoliberal approaches to the system of international relations and the place of international organizations in it. The former, recognizes only nation-states as global players, giving IOs only a secondary role. The latter stand on the opposite side of neoliberal institutionalism, arguing that IOs not only play a crucial role, but also have enough potential to solve common global problems.

In this article, the authors intend to identify the key contradictions that impede the development of a unified theoretical approach to the effectiveness of IOs (primarily such as the UN) in solving global collective problems. Studying the issue through the prism of theoretical research will make it

possible to outline the current problems of IO organization and identify ways to improve organizational effectiveness.

Realism vs. Neoliberalism

Both the realist and neoliberal paradigms of international relations each have a number of distinguished scholars on their side: John Mearsheimer, Robert Keohane, Barbara Koremenas, Kenneth Abbott, Michael Barnett and Martha Finamore, whose authoritative opinions tirelessly tip the scales in thier own favour.

The "father" of structural realism is commonly referred to as John Mearsheimer, one of the classics of international relations theory. His ideas that states are the key players in the international arena, while international organizations are only their instruments - agents of influence - are at the core of the realist mainstream. According to his vision of the situation, IOs only broadcast their own interests of states, and have no significant autonomy to solve international problems [1]. At the same time, other authors suggest that the legitimacy of IOs comes from their ability to address collective demands [2].

Neoliberals argue that IOs can both influence global processes autonomously and have the influence and resources to promote initiatives such as "free trade," "sustainable development," and "public goods" for all [3]. The UN is an ideal example of supporting neoliberal views - an organization whose budgets and decisions are based on the decisions of nation-states, but which also has broad autonomy to implement a range of initiatives [4; 5]. For example, the UN fights poverty, fights apartheid, protects children's rights, supports decolonization, and raises environmental and gender inequality issues to the top of the global agenda. Its work involves numerous bureaucratic procedures, collegial decisions, piles of reports, and contradictory actions by member countries. At the same time, however, it still reflects basic global needs and the attempt and possibility to meet them [6].

The complexity of theoretical concepts in relation to international organizations is that it is almost impossible to combine regional or global institutions into a single category. As the collective of authors led by B. Koremenos pointed out even the largest institutions have significant differences: they can be open or closed for entry, take decisions unanimously or by majority vote, have strong centralized management bodies or constitute a consultative platform [7]. Each mechanism or feature of the organizational structure can significantly affect an institution's ability to make effective decisions.

Therefore, it is not surprising, realists argue, that nation-states spend enormous resources and time on forming *a controlled* organizational structure of the IO to achieve international trade, economic and national security goals [7]. Moreover, the issue of security is the focus of attention, since the increase in power of one state within the IO inevitably poses a threat to another, or in other words inevitably leads to a "security dilemma," which, according to realists, is resolved either through a balance of power or through hegemony. A striking example here is the process of voting in the UN Security Council with the veto power of only five countries, while countries with no less economic, political and military

weight than conventional France, Britain or Russia have long appeared in the political arena. This alone makes it impossible to talk about the independence of the UN Security Council, an argument that is actively used by realists. Even cases of surprising unanimity, such as the resolutions on the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus or Afghanistan, are rather exceptions that confirm the rule, since they have never directly affected the interests of veto-wielding countries. [5].

Neoliberals, on the other hand, express the hope that states can still make collective decisions on the basis of IO with a focus on the overall benefit, provided that the organization of the institution encourages cooperation rather than outweighs the benefit in favor of only one party [8]. One of the best examples is considered economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region - APEC and ASEAN. Dent writes that despite the crises of 1997-1998 and a number of economic difficulties, the countries were able to build a really effective economic cooperation between both developed and developing countries [9]. What is particularly interesting about these two structures is the low level of institutionalism and the focus on national interests, which contradicts the usual constructs of Western MIs (such as NATO or the EU). APEC member countries deliberately deprived the secretariat of leverage and resources, and deliberately did not create mechanisms for effective dispute resolution.

Experts believe that rigid frameworks and rules would inevitably lead to the dominance of China's agenda (including on Taiwan) or more active actions by the United States, but APEC's "voluntary multilateralism" offers

a foundation for a compromise between multilateral cooperation and respect for national interests [10; 11]. Neoliberals believe that common interests can solve not only economic and political issues, but also security issues based on the concept of "collective security," which is the opposite of the "security dilemma" concept of realists.

Rational design of institutions

The effective work of the IOs depends directly on an organizational structure that allows for constructive dialogue to take place. The issues of bureaucracy, organizational efficiency, and decision-making are basic to any organization, whether it is a governmental, non-governmental, or private institution. However, the choice of an effective structure is extremely complex, since none of the existing approaches is universal for all IOs.

Studying this issue, neoliberal theorists introduce a special concept "rational design of institutions" (rational design of institutions), which is aimed at reducing bureaucracy and minimizing the risks of deception [7]. The authors focus on five "columns" of organizational structure: membership rules, a clear framework for the issues discussed, a focus on problem solving, flexibility in decision-making and control mechanisms. For example, if a situation requires a decision to be made as quickly as possible, the IO structure should provide for the possibility to involve the maximum number of stakeholders in the discussion without restrictions on formal membership (the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic may serve as an excellent example). On the other hand, some issues may require

such significant financial resources or power capacity that the discussion risks being prolonged indefinitely. In such cases, the IOs should find a way to link several different issues to each other in order to encourage the involvement of all stakeholders in resolving them through shuttle diplomacy. A good example of the evolution of the institutional framework is the transformation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) into the WTO over several years, which was the result of intensive negotiations over several years, taking into account the different economic and political interests of all participating countries [7].

On the other hand, a relatively unfortunate example of "rational design" is the UN, whose budget for peacebuilding initiatives is 50% funded by voluntary donations, most of which go to poor countries, which automatically means dependence on rich countries to set the UN agenda [4]. As a result, the UN spends less per year on peacekeeping than the New York City Fire Department or Police Department [5], unable "to unlock its potential for peace building and therefore forced to respond to crises rather than prevent them. [4].

Thus, in their research Koremenos and colleagues [7] emphasize that the effectiveness of the IO depends almost first and foremost on its organizational structure. A flexible and compromise structure will balance the distribution of dividends from joint decisions among the member states, while an ineffective one risks making the organization dependent on rich sponsor countries and destroying the balance of power.

The balance of power and the matter of trust

A key problem hindering the realization of the potential of international organizations is the players' mistrust of each other. When one side doubts the transparency of the behavior and goals of the other side, both players act based on their own rather than common interests [7]. At the same time, when there are more than two parties, the uncertainty in the future of the issue to be resolved increases significantly, because the scope and the number of participants have always been one of the main problems in the creation of MI, especially when some participants are significantly stronger economically or militarily than others. Even in the European Union, there is an obvious imbalance in voting, with individual countries using their informal weight to promote their own agenda with the same formal "weight" of votes.

Neoliberals argue that the difference in weight is resolved in practice through the mechanism of "iteration," which argues that if players are forced to cooperate on a long-term rather than a one-time basis, they will strive for more open and honest action. Thus, R. Axelrod and R. Keohane [12] emphasize that the "shadow of the future" is a guarantee of permanent relationships, long-term planning, reliability of information and feedback. Realists, represented by Mearsheimer [1] point out that there are significant gaps in the arguments of neoliberal institutionalists, because the players can easily ignore future projects and deceive each other for a variety of reasons. For example, because of the unequal distribution of power among the

members of the organization, which affects the decision-making process.

Practice shows that the developed Western states are most often the dominant power in the IO, which is due primarily to their economic power [13]. The UN Security Council, with its limited number of participants and veto power, is a center of multiple contradictions. Nevertheless, it is a positive example of an organization that has reached "surprisingly consensual and effective solutions" in a number of resolutions on the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq, as mentioned above [5; 14].

Researcher C. Elger in his theoretical calculations notes that the dominance of the states of the "global north" in the UNSC, does not allow to unlock the full potential of the organization. Without a fundamental revision of the balance of power in the key decision-making mechanisms "the UN will not have sufficient legitimacy to resolve more and more issues" [4]. [4]. Even the North-South divide is already seriously undermining the UN's effectiveness [15]. And many other IOs (G-7, OECD, etc.) have the same unequal representation among the players, depending on their economic weight and place in the regional political grid [14].

Theorists argue that for each specific IO, a change in the number of participating countries upward or downward may open the way to new opportunities for solving the problem and increase the effectiveness of the decisions made [7]. But at the same time, it may also increase the risks due to irreconcilability of the positions of individual participants on crucial issues or delay in the decision-making process over time. The example of the UN Security Council shows these fears quite clearly.

Legal Framework and Compliance

In addition, even if a decision is made, the question of the binding nature of its implementation and the commitment of all participants to the adopted agreements will inevitably arise. An analysis of the role of the normative framework in the mechanism of functioning is intended to solve this problem. Peterson [16], for example, notes that while General Assembly decisions are binding on a number of internal issues, with respect to external ones, resolutions are more like recommendations, which undermines obedience and increases the chances of withdrawal from the arrangements.

Researchers Abbott and Sneydel [17] note the need for a balance between "hard" mechanisms and "soft" recommendations, using the WTO as an example. While strict legislation reduces transaction costs, increases trust in the institution, and discourages frivolous behavior by nation-states, soft recommendations (e.g., ethical standards) help achieve cooperation and mutually beneficial cooperation [18]. In the case of IOs that do not set strict requirements for compliance with their decisions, there is a risk of seeing neglect on the part of member states.

Models for assessing the effectiveness of IOs

The issue of a model for assessing the effectiveness of a particular IO structure is a separate problem that also divides the theoretical camps. Thus, realists use the

"principal-agent" theory for this purpose, in which IOs used as an agent seek to bring the ever-changing interests of nation-states (principals) to a common denominator. This theory literally follows the realist view of the world, since it is the principals who assign tasks to the agents and, moreover, can, through them, broadcast their own way of solving the problem.

But at the same time, Barnett and Finnemore's research [19] demonstrates that because of their multitasking and abundant resources, IOs are also able to advance their own agenda, independent of the "principals". From this perspective, all decisions made within IOs not only reflect the interests of the most influential players, but also correspond to the interests of the organization itself [20].

In general, realists recognize that IOs represent an important and, in fact, the only mediator between countries with different levels of influence and interests [19]. The participation of even a partially autonomous, relatively neutral actor can increase the legitimacy of individual and collective decisions and give nation-states additional rationales for granting IOs a greater degree of autonomy [17].

But such actions require nation-states to share some of their sovereignty with the IO. Thus, the UN offers a unique function in that it has the power to bring leaders of democratic and authoritarian states to the same table and dictate standards of democratic behavior and force them to seek and develop cooperative solutions. And although the UN bears all the problems of a cumbersome bureaucratic international structure (peculiarities of internal culture, lack of power mechanisms, unequal distribution of power), it remains

a key global player. Even for superpowers, such as the U.S. active work within the UN maximizes "soft power," ensures the legitimacy of actions and maintains a favorable image [5]. For example, when the UNSC adopts a resolution, it invariably declares a commitment to the principles of humanism and humanity, and if any country refuses to support the resolution, it is automatically positioned as a country that rejects these principles.

Proponents of neoliberal institutionalism, in turn, to assess the effectiveness of MI refer to the "game theory", which gives several options for the development of the situation, including with benefits for all participants. At the same time, it is noted that the analysis on the basis of the "theory of games" requires a clear understanding of what the actors will win and how they will bargain [21]. The growth of stakes where the gain from fraud exceeds the gain from cooperation will require a mechanism of punishment and accountability in order to stop attempts to cheat [22].

In general, neoliberal institutionalists, through "game theory," seek to model different scenarios that will allow participants to achieve positive-sum, increasing-sum, or zero-sum game winning outcomes for all participants. The structure of universal dividends should promote the intensification of cooperation and encourage all players to work out a mutually beneficial solution. But it should not be simplified into one-sided "win-lose" or "black and white" concepts; neoliberal experts call for "Pareto optimality. However, one must take into account that the dividends sought for the member states in the international arena

may differ from the domestic ones, those demanded by the electorate [23]. It is much easier for nation-states to agree to share their resources if they are interested in the agreement, including for domestic reasons, as, for example, happened when countries signed Article VIII of the Agreement of the International Monetary Fund [24].

At the same time, "game theory" reveals the need for a balance between questions of "consent" and "coercion". The desire for a collective solution in the absence of a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the decision means that the countries have not come to a deep cooperation. Of course, some experts emphasize the empirical difficulties of measuring consent on any scale, but they note the effectiveness of those organizations in which there is a strong secretariat capable of forcing countries to make a compromise decision (the International Monetary Fund or the International Labor Organization) [25].

But much to the regret of neoliberal theorists, today the international arena often and unknowingly applies the principle of the "prisoner's dilemma," which as rules strongly narrows the directions for cooperation (usually to one), while reality actually offers nation-states a wide range of possibilities and potential gains from multilateral cooperation [7]. The application of "game theory" in the study "Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions" has shown that the main focus of multilateral cooperation is the cooperation of national states. It has shown that the main reason for the failure of cooperation between international actors is the lack

of information, while the problem of balancing "consent" and "enforcement" has moved to second place. And if the first problem in the theory is quite solvable, the second requires initiative and common political will [12].

Conclusion

In general, it is practically impossible to bring the discussion of the effectiveness of IOs under a single denominator - this idea has repeatedly found its enthusiasts and been crushed by the arguments of skeptics. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify obvious contradictions in the theoretical debate and in the practical work of IR.

In theoretical terms, the debate between realists and neoliberals remains unresolved on the most basic question - are IOs still controlled by states, or do they have the potential for truly independent cooperation? Despite the obvious evidence in favor of the state-centered approach of the realists, their concept has always been vulnerable due to omissions in basic suggests and gaps in empirical evidence [26]. International organizations can and do influence the process of international relations, perhaps not with the degree of autonomy that proponents of neoliberal institutionalism see, but still very significantly [7].

Practice shows that the balance of power (i.e., the weight of the players) and the structure (or institutional design) of the institutions remain the key problem points in organizing the effective work of any IO. The IOs remain an important element of international relations, since there are a number of issues which national states

are unable to solve without cooperation within the framework of the IOs, just as the IOs are unable to achieve their goals without the voluntary and decisive support of national states (the formation of the UN budget for peacekeeping initiatives is a vivid confirmation of this). Today the IOs are free to choose their structure and control mechanisms from a variety of theoretical tools proposed by proponents of realist and neoliberal approaches but each one will be effective depends on the goals and objectives of each particular organization.

The example of the UN as an organization that combines both player and platform allow the ideas of both realists and neoliberals to be presented. In its example,

both theoretical camps can defend both state-centric views and the benefits of cooperation. Clearly, for the effectiveness of international organizations to develop, research and discussion in this area must continue.

A key theoretical question for further research is the applicability of theoretical findings and conclusions to other regional or global organizations. Today an important gap and a direction for future research in the theory of international organizations is evident, namely, the universality of ideas and mechanisms for their implementation in the practical activities of IOs of all levels and areas of work.

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