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**International Relations Theory  
and Human Rights**

The article is an overview of the theoretical approaches that are the most prominent in the contemporary International Relations and of the stance on human rights these approaches acquire due to their theoretical premises. The aim of the article, apart from growing a comprehensive picture on IR theories on human rights is twofold. First, it is to reveal strengths and weaknesses of each of the surveyed theoretical approaches when they are applied to a human rights inquiry. The second, it discusses the examples of such studies to substantiate the claims the authors makes about those theoretical approaches within the IR discipline. In conclusion, the authors gives the arguments in favor of inclusion IR analytical tools into human rights studies.

**Key words:** human rights, human rights theory, international relations, international relations theory, realism, liberalism, neo-liberalism, institutionalism, game theory, regime theory, hegemonic stability, constructivism, boomerang theory, norm entrepreneurs, norm analysis.

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**Халықаралық қатынастар  
теориясы және адам құқығы**

Берілген мақала халықаралық қатынастар пәнінің қазіргі заманғы даму сатысындағы негізгі теориялық тәсілдерге шолу жасайды, теориялық тәсілдер негізінде адам құқықтарының рөлі қандай деген сұраққа жауап іздейді және аталған теория өкілдерінің адам құқықтары мәселесіне қатысты ұстанымы туралы мәлімет береді. Мақаланың мақсаты адам құқықтары саласында халықаралық қатынастар туралы ғылымның теориялық тәсілдерін сипаттаумен қатар екі аспектіге көңіл бөледі. Біріншіден, адам құқықтары мәселесіне байланысты зерттеу жұмысын жүргізу мақсатында қолдану қажет болған жағдайда әр тәсілдің күшті және әлсіз тұстарын көрсетеді. Екіншіден, халықаралық қатынастар пәні шеңберінде автордың ұстанымына дәлел ретінде осындай зерттеулерден мысалдар келтіреді. Қорытынды ретінде адам құқықтары мәселелерін зерттеуде халықаралық қатынастардың сараптамалық аппаратын қолданудың пайдасына дәйектер келтіреді.

**Түйін сөздер:** адам құқығы, адам құқығы теориясы, халықаралық қатынастар, халықаралық қатынастар теориясы, реализм, либерализм, неолиберализм, институционализм, ойын теориясы, режим теориясы, тұрақтылық гегемоны, конструктивизм, бумеранг теориясы, нормативтік талдау.

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**Теория международных  
отношений и права человека**

В статье приводится обзор теоретических подходов, которые являются наиболее значимыми в современных международных отношениях. Цель данной статьи: во-первых, выявить сильные и слабые стороны каждого из рассмотренных теоретических подходов, когда они применяются к расследованию в области прав человека. Во-вторых, в статье приводятся примеры подобных исследований с тем, чтобы подтвердить позицию автора о данных теоретических подходах в рамках дисциплины МО. В заключение авторы приводят аргументы в пользу применения аналитического инструментария МО в исследованиях в области прав человека.

**Ключевые слова:** права человека, теория права человека, международные отношения, теория международных отношений, реализм, либерализм, неолиберализм, институционализм, теория игр, теория режимов, гегемоном стабильность, конструктивизм, теория бумеранга, нормативный анализ.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### Introduction

The article deals with the interrelations of human rights and international relations theories, namely it encompasses the attitude forwards the human rights question in such theoretical approaches within the IR discipline as *realism*, *liberalism*, and *constructivism*. The literatures discussed in the article are relevant in terms of both theoretical debate and analytical tools for human rights study because they deal with implications the abovementioned schools in the field of international relations make about the place and role of human rights within inter-state behavior. Therefore, the article, which is a literature review, touches upon the writings of those who conceptualize human rights within the IR discipline and those who actually study human rights through the lens of the IR theory. The aim is, therefore, to describe how the «color» of this lens, which depends on where the author is positioned theoretically, would influence the understanding of human rights. Thus, the author endeavors to show how the reviewed theoretical approaches could be useful for any particular human rights enquiry.

### IR Theories and Human Rights: what have been done

Incorporation of IR dimension into human rights studies has been gradual and with rather different results. Until late 1970s, the bulk of human rights literature had been written by lawyers [1]. However, in order to close the gap between international legal theory and international political practice, the authors gradually started to emphasize that empirical research was needed that would incorporate sociology, anthropology, ethnography and international relations [2]. By now, there has been a considerable amount of literature that includes international history of human rights into their accounts [3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8]. There have been those who argue that inclusion of IR analysis into a broader, more interdisciplinary study would «link local cultures with international forces» [2]. There have been authors, who, while doing so, point at certain limitations [1] and those who are interested in possible methodological contribution of such an inclusion [9]. It is important to remember, however, that IR discipline is not homogeneous and, therefore, it may produce different impact

on human right inquiry depending on the theoretical approach of the former.

The oldest school of thoughts within the IR is that of realism, which, after temporary loosing its prominence has gained its momentum again after the end of the cold war. *Realist* views [10, 11] are state-centric and Hobbesian. The contemporary realist scholars see anarchy as *the* feature of international relations where states, being autonomous, rational, self-interest and self-help actors, operate to maximize their power (i.e. a coercive material capacity be it militarily, economic or diplomatic). Understandingly, realists are skeptical about international law and as well as international regimes and institutions including those of human rights.

The reluctance of the realists to see human right as significant denominator of international affairs shall not preclude the human rights scholars from encompassing the realist approach into their study. Realist analysis may be of great use when applied to the apparent «double standards» and discrepancies between the international human rights legal norms or political discourses, from one hand, and actual behavior of the states about their own human rights practices and those within the borders of the other states, from the other. An illustrious example of realist study of human rights, for that matter, would be Krasner [12].

The oldest rivalry of realism is liberalism. *Liberalism* claims that international actors have the ability to overcome Hobbesian «state of nature» via establishing a sort of transnational «social contract» among the states whose legitimacy depends on their capacities to ensure rights and freedoms of individuals. Following the idea of democratic peace, contemporary liberals believe that the «history ends» [13] in the world peace of liberal democratic societies and advocate a more cosmopolitan vision of the international system with a universal government. For Fukuyama [13], history is a purposeful process with the ultimate end of universal human rights flourishing. Liberalism is criticized for being utopian and culturally imperialistic [14]. The «grip of the sovereign state» is considered the major obstacle [3].

As for the vision the liberalism appropriate towards the role of human rights, the key postulate is that better human rights in the world would require a system that allows more interventionist approaches. Liberalism claims that the characteristics of individual states are crucial for their behavior on international arena and points out the uniqueness of democratic liberal states as their domestic preferences and political traditions transcend the other

determinant of international system [15, 16]. On which the realists answer would be that the Western liberal democracies are still the most powerful and coherent coalition [17], the claim that liberalists do not reject altogether. However, Liberalism does not explain why the liberal West choses to intervene in some cases and opts not to act in others. The most obvious added value of inclusion the liberalist perspective into human rights scholarship is that liberalism overcomes oversimplification of realism; states themselves are not seen as solid billiard balls colliding on the international arena, but rather configurations of individual and group interests projected into the international system through a particular kind of government [18].

*Institutionalism* or *Neo-liberalism* [19, 20], which developed in the result of the realist critique of liberalism, states that the uncertainty of international relations make co-operation via institutions or regimes beneficial and, therefore, possible or even necessary and inevitable. As for human rights, both Realists and Institutionalists agree that states may do something either unilaterally or multilaterally only if it is in their interests. Institutionalism provides more plausible explanation of existence of international organizations and regimes and answers the questions about inconsistent international behavior of Western coalition about human rights that has been left unaddressed by traditional liberal scholars. *Regime* and *Game Theories*, which are the middle ground between Realism and Institutionalism, may be of a great use to analyze states decision-making such as entering into a particular human rights regime, domestic compliances/non-compliances, intervention/non-intervention when the rights are violated by another state. Such kind of analysis was conducted by Donnelly [1,5].

The IR approach that is the most «interested» in human rights is constructivism. Just as Liberalists, *Constructivists* [21, 22, 23] claim that states are not the sole actors of international relations; they are attentive to the role of the IGOs and NGOs. According to Wendt [22] what important is not military power or international institutions, but those «social meanings» they acquire in the process of international socialization of the states. Constructivism distinguishes between the «logic of consequences» and «logic of appropriateness» [24, 25]. In other words, human rights are considered to be a discourse that is shared by states in the result of their international socialization. It is also believed that «norm entrepreneurs» have capacities to alter state behavior [26, 27]. The «boomerang theory» of Risse, Ropp and Sikkink [28] is influenced by Fennimore's norms analysis

[29]. It integrates the national and international levels of human-rights analyses stating that improvements of domestic human-rights performance are most likely when there are social movements within states that are committed to maintaining pressure that is amplified by international actors – be it states, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations – and then «boomerangs» back onto the target state's government, creating more favorable conditions for national pressure groups. What these kind of studies overlook is how the pressure is generated from beyond to exercise political coercion on states with the ultimate goal being far from those of improving human rights and how human rights activism may be instrumental in this process.

Having surveyed what contribution the IR may make to the human rights scholarship, one shall now consider the examples of such studies. Theoretically and analytically, the most relevant works are those of Donnelly and Forsythe; the latter rightly noted that theorizing about human rights foreign policy is either liberalism or realism with some elements of constructivism. Yet, the author does not have the ambition to project liberalism into realism [30, 31]. While agreeing with Forsythe [30, 31] that the task of an IR scholar is to identify the status of human rights into contemporary international relations, trace their evolution and predict their future, this study rather uses Donnelly's analysis [1, 5] as an example of how constructivist concept of human rights (not universal but historically conditioned) can be incorporated into rationalist understanding of international relations. Donnelly's regimes analysis, which distinguishes declaratory, promotional, implementation and enforcement regimes that can be relatively weak or strong, is especially relevant.

In the context of case studies. His explanation of the UN weakness is a «realist game theory account». His explanation of strength of the European regime is a more «neo-liberalist game theory» account emphasizing homogeneity of the European nations in terms of values and political cultures as well as small risks for states' interests. The inter-American regime is explained through the logic of «hegemonic stability» similarly to that of Keohane [19, 20] with the dominant role of the USA.

### Conclusion

Finally, while agreeing with Landmann [9] that the goal of empirical social science is explanation and understanding of observed social phenomena, in my view, the IR may and shall contribute into understanding of human rights for the following reasons. Firstly, these days it impossible to draw a clear line not only between the political and cultural but also between the domestic and international. Secondly, it is rather common that human rights activists have too high expectations and too steep demands from international system to improve the human rights performances of national governments. The merit of the IR is that it reveals the limitation of the capacity of international actors and factors to influence domestic human rights performances and explains the complex nature of these limitations. Therefore, the IR may provide the human rights scholars and activists with a more realistic picture of the international politics. Thirdly, acknowledging that the influence of external factors is rather limited, one shall admit that none states are utterly isolated or isolationist and they are exposed to this influence and adjust their policies accordingly.

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