# AN ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS' INDEPENDENT ROLE IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD POLITICS

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## Abstract

The paper analyses one of the pertinent debate upon the question of the independence of the International Organizations (IO) with respect to their host states in the international politics domain employing the social constructivist lens. The study draws upon Weber's bureaucratic approach to establish IOs as independent actors. It is argued that IOs independent-rational legal authority, control over information and expertise, establish them as independent bureaucratic structures. To assess this line of reasoning the counter arguments of the materialist perspectives - realist and neoliberal institutionalist - are critically discussed and gaps in the literature are highlighted. The paper concludes that both realist and neoliberalist perspectives are theories for states and state behaviour; hence, they widely remain state-centric and overlook the bureaucratic nature of IOs which grants them independent authority. Therefore, to understand the independent authority of IOs they should be viewed as bureaucracies.

**Keywords:** International Organizations, Independent-rational, Institutionalist, Neoliberalist

### Introduction

The role International Organisations play in the globalised era is becoming increasingly critical. It is widely believed that International Organisations (IO) execute an important role in peace-making, economic stability, health and in various other pivotal matters with a mandate to act in the interest of the community. international There are around 300 intergovernmental organizations around the world today dealing with a significant amount of international and inter-state challenges. However, one of the major problems faced in the International Relations literature is the absence of a coherent approach towards the independent authority of the International Organisations. The concept of 'independence' of the International Organisation has not been methodically applied to the in-depth study of international institutions in terms of their organisational behaviour, policy-making, decisionmaking and their independent behaviour in global politics.1 Instead, more

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attention is traditionally given to varieties of theories, which seek to explain why the IOs are created and focus more on the general importance of the IOs in the international community as forums of inter-state cooperation, while little attention is drawn towards how the International Organisations behave after they are created. As postulated by Barnett and Finnemore, "...international relations (IR) scholars have not given systematic consideration to how IOs actually behave. Most of our theories are theories of states and state behaviour".<sup>2</sup>

Hence, the study uses a constructivist theoretical signpost to address the independent and autonomous behaviour of the International Organisations (IO) with respect to their host states. In order to treat IOs as independent actors and to assess their power in the globalised world, the Weberian bureaucracy approach is underlined. As postulated by Barnet and Finnemore "Bureaucracy is a distinctive social form of authority with its own internal logic and behaviour proclivities". The bureaucratic structure gives independent authority to the IOs to formulate rules, norms and to define new interests and international goals.

It is argued that, the bureaucratic structure and the rational-legal authority of IOs imbues independent behaviour irrespective of their initial creators (that is, states), by stressing upon the role of the IOs in international policymaking, the power of information, the creation of values, and norms as well as the diffusion of norms.<sup>4</sup> To justify the independent authority of the IOs, the study discusses examples of World Bank, UNHRC and IMF over the decades.

Initially the paper examines the different strands of organisational theory and explores its implications. The paper is divided into two sections broadly. The study's part one focuses upon the economist approaches - Realist and Neoliberal Institutionalist, which seek to explain the role of IOs as welfare-improving solutions, although both theories disagree about the role of the IOs in the international community. Realists view IOs through the lens of power and security thus, perceiving IOs as instruments of the state. While the liberal institutionalist perspective looks beyond power and security and provides a vast amount of scholarship on the role of IOs as avenues of peace and cooperation but it fails to address the autonomy of IOs. Hence, both approaches agree that IOs help the states to further their own interests and remain widely state-centric. They do not pay enough attention to the organisational behaviour and policymaking behaviour of the IOs when they are created and their institutional elements, which make IOs independent of their host states.

The second part of the study elaborates the social constructivist perspective to address the gaps between the neorealist and liberalist literature by understanding IOs as bureaucracies. Weber's insights provide a strong critique towards how the economist approaches have treated IOs. To understand the independent authority of the IOs they should be viewed as bureaucracies and

the bureaucratic characteristics that profoundly shape their behaviour should be highlighted. As bureaucracies, IOs use their 'social construction power' to construct social reality which is done through establishing new interests, norms, social activities and defining meanings. The bureaucratic nature asserts the autonomous authority of the IOs and establishes a set of relevant features which gives independence to the institutions, which the liberalist and realist overlook.

# Neorealist and Neoliberalist Institutionalist Perspective

Within the field of IR, there are two perspectives of theorising International Organisations. One is the economist approach rooted in assumptions of instrumental rationality and efficiency concern; the other is the sociological and focused on issues of legitimacy and power. The economist perspective consists of the neorealism, neoliberalism approach and their debate over the role of IOs. The neorealist and neoliberals primarily focus on only two tools of power that is in the form of material inducements or information. Neorealist and Neoliberals perceive IOs as structures of rules, interests and decision-making procedures through which states acts. Thus, they define the role of IOs as functions that seek to exist to solve the problems of market imperfections, incomplete information, and for the welfare-improving solutions for their members.

"Neoliberals and realists disagree about the degree to which constraints of anarchy, an interest in relative versus absolute gains, and fears of cheating will scuttle international institutional arrangements or hobble their effectiveness, but both agree, implicitly or explicitly, that IOs help states further their interests where they are allowed to work". Hence, both approaches remain state-centric.

Realists primarily focus on power and security in the anarchic, self-interested system while determining the autonomy of IOs. According to the realists, IOs are set up by states to serve their own interests; hence, IOs are dependent on states and lack the authority of independent decision-making in international politics. Due to realists' prime focus on the distribution of power, the UN Security Council is often taken as a prime example and suggests that IOs are nothing but 'instruments' for states to maximise their relative power and increase state security.<sup>8</sup> Hence, according to the realists', international organisations do not exercise independent delegation authority.

For realists and neo-realists, states are the primary actors in international relations. In this conception, role of international organisation is in large measure influenced by interests of powerful states. In some ways, for realists, role of international organisations is subordinate to the role of state power and national interests of major powers. Morgenthau argued that states are central to international politics and being so states use IOs to pursue their global interests. Morgenthau (1948) has gone as far to posit that IOs and employment of judicial

methods cannot resolve disputes which are most likely to lead to war between states. Meanwhile, according to Mearsheimer, international institutions only exercise marginal power, making them a reflection of the distribution of power in the international system. It is are tools of their host states and function for the interests of the states. Thus, according to realists, although the states cooperate with other states on international matters, many realists, claim that in the self-help anarchic system states are primarily focused towards maximising their true interest in the international community. According to Dr Frankenstein, states only give selective power to the IOs. Thus, realists give examples of the inability of the UN to resolve conflicts, for instance, Kashmir or the Arab-Israel conflict which depict how IOs have failed to settle disputes.

On the contrary, Liberalists adopt a pragmatic approach towards the functioning of the IOs and view IOs as arenas and forums of interstate policy cooperation. Liberalists adopt a Kantian version of the international system and assert that security is not the main issue in the international community. Liberalism assumes that states are not the only important actors in world politics and that IOs coupled with international regimes, international agreements aim to achieve cooperation among nations.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, realists and liberalists agree that international politics takes place under anarchy. More specifically, it is the absence of an international government which can enforce international laws and also undertake oversight over compliance of states with bilateral and multilateral agreements. This makes international cooperation, particularly, difficult to realise. However, multilateral cooperation is not an impossible task. IOs enable international cooperation through incentivising states and also addressing constraints to the extent possible. Axelrod and Keohane (1985) argue international cooperation under anarchy is influenced by three factors namely, commonality of interests, shadow of future, and number of actors.<sup>15</sup> Every state perceives interests differently, and has varied preferences over importance of them. Moreover, states remain cautious of the future payoff and seek immediate benefit. Finally, large number of factors influencing international cooperation decreases appeal of such cooperation for individual states. These challenges, Axelrod and Keohane suggested can be addressed through formation of international regimes. For them IOs can influence the structure of international cooperation and incentivise states through relative gains.

The neo-liberalist institutionalists aim to define the IOs by stressing upon the importance of IOs as forums for mediating peace and cooperation. Although the neoliberal institutionalist scholarship defines the vast role of the IOs, it does not grant IOs the independent autonomy of their host states. Instead the neoliberals stress that there is more to international system than military power and IOs aim to address more salient matters like human rights, international

law of justice or human health. They stress on IOs influence in dealing with universal challenges like global warming or HIV/AIDS as well as IOs influence in interstate matters such as healthcare, financial policies and electoral processes whilst at the same time implementing disincentives like trade sanctions.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, both Neorealist and Liberal Institutionalism remain state-centric as they are underpinned by the intergovernmental principle.<sup>17</sup> That is, IOs act in the shared interests of states, making them dependent on their host states in their decision-making.

Although state-centric approaches provide a vast amount of scholarship on the function of the IOs, they still treat IOs as empty shells. For them, they are not purposive actors and have no ontological independence. According to these approaches, states provide the money for the sustainability of IOs and through that, they dominate the decision-making in the IOs; making it difficult to imagine the role of IOs as anything more than instruments of their host states. The relevant question to ask is why IOs behave as they do. Since "realism and liberalism, however, provide no basis for asserting independent utility functions for IOs. Ontologically, these are theories about states. They provide no basis for imputing interests to IOs beyond the goals states (that is, principles) give them".18 Thus, assumptions of the economist theories deserve to be critically analysed. The notion that IOs simply do what the states want overlooks many instances in which IOs developed their own ideas and pursued their own agendas. Similarly, the functionalist assumption that IOs are created to fulfil certain functions of the states is also flawed as IOs often behave in an inefficient and self-defeating manner and do not serve the interest of the states that have created them.19

The Constructivists provide a framework which looks beyond the economist approaches and treats IOs as 'social facts' which exhibit the ability to create their own rules, norms and interests due to their bureaucratic structure. Constructivism, largely similar to institutional liberalism stresses upon the role of ideational factors in international politics. Ruggie (1998) argues that ideational factors can influence 'outlook and behaviour' of states in culture, aspiration and beliefs. Moreover, for constructivists human consciousness can influence course of international politics, thus, leading to cooperation between nations. Similarly, Wendt (1995) posits that social structures established through sharing of acquired knowledge shape international system. Impact on system could be both positive and negative. These structures also have an agency to influence peace and security in international system. Thus, states value a role of IOs in international system and would prefer cooperation.

Hence, to understand the autonomy of IOs, we need to pay attention, not only to states interests but also to IOs interests. Therefore, the following section of

the article will look beyond the state-centric approaches and will aim to establish the independent authority of the IOs.

# **Bureaucracy in International Organisations**

To understand IOs as independent actors and sites of authority, one needs to study Weber's study of bureaucratization in depth. The framework of Weber's bureaucracy to establish IOs as independent actors is best suited here. The aim is not to explain Weber's study but to explain how Weber's insights provide a basis for IOs' independent authority.

A modern bureaucracy is comprised of hierarchy, continuity, impersonality and expertise. These are the traits of bureaucracy which allow it to be an autonomous actor. Impersonal rules are the cornerstone of the bureaucracy and shape organisations' behaviour and authority. These rules are the standpoint which gives organisations the authority to respond in an efficient manner. "Rules are explicit or implicit norms, regulations, and expectations that define and order the social world and the behaviour of actors". Bureaucracies' rules prescribe actions and behaviour of others, for instance, refugee countries, conflict countries or indebted countries. Thus, the centrality of rules and rulemaking procedure are recognised as the essential part of IOs behaviour. The rules provide the authority to IOs to shape problems, define tasks and constitute the social world in ways that make the world amenable to intervention by bureaucracies themselves.

Thus, Weber's framework of bureaucracy provides a powerful argument to characterise IOs as independent actors because IOs create and implement rules, draft their own agendas and construct social norms based on their knowledge and expertise.<sup>23</sup> As Haftel and Thompson put it, "the independence of an institution largely determines its authority and influence – in short, its ability to shape international politics".<sup>24</sup> Therefore, we consider IOs as bureaucracies governed by their own internal logic, norms and agendas, which enable them to be independent actors with their own rational-legal authority.

Therefore, the bureaucratic nature of IOs allows them to be political creatures independent of their host states and structure societies they were created to serve due to their rational-legal authority, normative appeal, control over information and expertise.<sup>25</sup> As argued by Douglass North (1990) "institutions may have built-in, self-reinforcing mechanisms that promote persistence and growth over time. Institutions become 'sticky' and tend to accrete new constituents, providing an impetus for expansion".<sup>26</sup> The IMF creates rules that provide solutions on how to solve the economic crisis and balance of payments deficits. Also, UNHRC creates its own set of rules governing how to prevent and solve the refugee crisis, which in turn legitimates intervention by the IOs. Moreover, the rules can establish the identity of IOs,

for example, the UN peacekeeping rules about the consent are an integral part of the UN peacekeeping role in the world politics.<sup>27</sup>

Bureaucracies are by definition, an authority and every authority is a social construction. The centrality of rule allows IOs rational-legal authority and expertise knowledge which formalises the basis of their independence. As bureaucracies, IOs embody authority not only to form rational-legal authority, but they acquire their authority from delegation process, moral claims and expertise. All of this allows IOs to act as autonomous actors of their host states as IOs do more than executing international agreements between states.

There are four types of authority - rational-legal, delegated, moral and expert that contribute towards making IOs an independent authority to a larger degree. This authority enables IOs to use discursive and institutional resources to get other actors defer them. Rational-legal authority and delegation form the cornerstone of IOs' independence from their host states. The delegation of authority to create rules or to resolve disputes has been classified as the principal elements of the Institutions degree of autonomy. The IOs independence and delegation are closely intertwined and IOs which possess greater delegation authority have the means to shape policies and set agendas. Thus, the authority of the bureaucracies allows IOs to become independent of the states that created them.

As a bureaucracy, IOs are conferred with power flowing from the legitimacy of rational-legal authority, technical expertise and control over information. These factors provide a strong theoretical basis for perceiving IOs as autonomous actors in the larger social environment. As stated by Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Sindal who define 'institutional independence' of IOs due to their bureaucratic structure which possesses legitimate authority and controls information and expertise.30 The examples where IOs have become independent due to their control over information and rationality are readily available. For instance, the UN's peacekeepers contract their authority by claiming they are independent, neutral actors who simply implement UN Security Council Resolutions. The UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is a prominent example of the IOs as independent authority, functioning as supranational bureaucracies. The UNMIK was chartered in 1999 in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, after the Kosovo crisis.31 The resolution demanded the withdrawal of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia forces from the province of Kosovo and the establishment of a temporary civilian administration in Kosovo, to give the region a considerable amount of autonomy. The UNMIK played a vital part in administrating the affairs of Kosovo by addressing domestic issues like education and healthcare, thus making it a new autonomous state-level.32 Thus, UNMIK was a representation of an international bureaucracy possessing its own independent

authority as a non-state actor due to its own rules, hierarchies, norms and values. Haftel and Thompson state, "The existence of a supranational bureaucracy, typically embodied in a secretariat or a commission, is an important sign of IO independence".<sup>33</sup>

The moral authority of bureaucracies allows IOs to present themselves as depoliticized and impartial actors. Expertise authority makes IOs authoritative and independent due to their expertise knowledge and control over information. However, the specialised knowledge derived from bureaucracies gives the IOs independence to make judgements or solve problems but also to transform information into knowledge that is to construct information and give it meaning. The control over information and deploying expertise to do tasks is thus, a hallmark of the bureaucracies as it persuaded actors to confer to IOs specialised knowledge. For instance, the World Bank widely exercises its expertise to establish its authority independent of the states that created them. The World Bank has exercised power over the development policies due to its expert staff and its impactful research models and reports. 34 For example, World Bank expertise authority like reports about HIV/AIDS pandemic and SARS helps to establish Word Bank's independent authority as the states rely on them to better understand the transnational dynamics of the diseases and seek their advice to draft respective policies. The World Bank not only collects data but it gives meaning to the information collected by transforming it into knowledge. All of this coupled with the World Banks claim of neutrality and its apolitical decision-making style has given the World Bank authority in the global development.

In case of World Bank, it is important to underline that Bank has been subject to multiple pressures. Once most powerful members of the Bank forged consensus it led to bureaucratic and behavioural reform of the Bank's agenda and working. In some ways, World Bank was subject to the goals of G-7 states, although the Bank did exercise some degree of autonomy in its agenda and spending decisions. However, it represents autonomous behaviours as it was exercising delegated authority, rather than independent decision-making as an IO. Moreover, Bank also offers a service to Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) and developing countries, which often are unable to undertake analytical studies on their national development and economic policy agenda. States, thus, need the Bank on a recurring basis. It provides the Bank legitimacy and space to influence national decision-making. Bank in some ways thus exercises delegated authority on behalf of states, owing to its professional bureaucracy.

Similarly, the IMF derives its authority and autonomy from its professional expertise. The IMF expert knowledge greatly enhances its power. By deploying specialised knowledge and intellectual technologies the IMF has built up its power and its growing role in the developing world.<sup>35</sup> The IMF has established

its technical assistance programmes that were designed to develop new economic models and enable countries to successfully implement the recommendations and absorb knowledge. The IMF thus uses its expertise to regulate the developing world economy and to establish its own independent expert authority. Hence, the expert authority of IOs enables them to diffuse norms and establish models of good political behaviour. For instance, the UNHRC helps to give the meaning of not only to who the 'refugee' is but what course of action should be taken. The UNHRC promotes awareness regarding international refugee law among states.<sup>36</sup> Through this, the UNHRC not only fixes meaning but it diffuses norms in the international community.

Therefore, authority makes IOs what they are and shapes their behaviour. Authority provides IO bureaucracies to serve a social purpose as 'social creatures', as it is the values and reasons for serving that establish IOs independent authority. IOs make authoritative decisions, which have farreaching global influence. IOs work on domestic governance issues and oversee the current affairs of the state that once used to be prerogative of states. For example, the European Central Bank oversees monetary policy for various influential states. IOs influence dealing with universal challenges like global warming or HIV/AIDS as well as interstate matters such as healthcare, financial policies and electoral processes. Thus, the autonomous policymaking behaviour enables us to perceive that International Organisations do act independently to a large degree.

Finally, the moot point is IOs can act as autonomous bodies; however, they are not completely independent actors. Their bureaucratic capacity and spread gives them an over-sized influence. However, it is subject to parameters of delegated decision-making by the major countries. World Bank demonstrates it through a crucial role in shaping international development agenda. World Bank has influenced development policies of developing countries. In a way it reflects constructive argument that IOs influence international politics through setting up of new norms. Nonetheless, IOs will remain independent influence on state behaviour. Their impact, however, will be incremental as states and IOs make mutual adjustment.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, the study critically highlights the assumptions drawn from the neoliberal institutionalist and neorealist perspective based on the economist approach and point out the gaps regarding IOs independent role. The discussion justly illustrates that although the realists and liberalists disagree in how they perceive the role of IOs, but they both agree on the intergovernmental principle (IOs are actors which help the states to further their own interests). As these approaches are based on the intergovernmental principle and cannot act

independently, they focus more on providing explanations of why IOs are created and what purpose they serve in providing state cooperation. However, they fail to question how IOs behave once they are created. Hence, to address these ambiguities this research study expounds on the constructivist approach which is deeply rooted in the sociological institutional behaviour and looks beyond the materialist approach. The constructivist approach seeks to answer this question by explaining the bureaucratic structure of the IOs that enables them to act above the intergovernmental principle.

Therefore, although IOs are enabled by states, they do function autonomously. The bureaucratic structure allows IOs to build social norms and values as well as to draft their own goals and implement policies based on their expertise and knowledge.<sup>37</sup> The incorporated examples of the Word Bank, UNMIK project the high level of International Organisation autonomy. Thus, International Organisations can initiate policies that make IOs autonomous, non-state actors.

In nutshell, the preceding discussion maintains that, to understand what IOs 'do', we need to comprehend what IOs 'are'. IOs are bureaucracies and bureaucracies are rational, technical, impartial and social constructs that create the basis of the independent authority of the IOs from their host states. The bureaucratic nature allows a basis of the conceptualisation of IOs behaviour and independence, which is overlooked by the neoliberals and neorealist scholars. Once IOs are created they use their authority to create actors and actions, give meanings and diffuse new norms around the globe to establish their authority. Therefore, through fixing meanings, establishing categories, and diffusing norms, IOs use their authority to exercise power. This establishes IOs as autonomous independent actors with their far-reaching global influence.

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