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## Прозападные международные неправительственные организации как предмет современной политической науки

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**Аннотация. Введение.** В исследовании акцент делается на деятельности прозападных международных неправительственных организаций (МНПО), могущих представлять угрозу национальной безопасности России, а также на их политологической концептуализации. Работа состоит из нескольких разделов. В разделе «Введение» обосновывается, что современная адаптация прозападных МНПО к новым геополитическим условиям требует нового политологического осмыслиения. **Материалы и методы.** В «Материалы и методы» представлены эмпирическая база и концепции, составившие методологическую базу исследования (теория транснационализма, концепции глобальной политики и сетевой власти и др.). В разделе «Обзор литературы» рассматриваются три группы публикаций: работы, посвященные 1) теоретическим аспектам МНПО, 2) классификациям МНПО, 3) использованию государствами МНПО в качестве своих инструментов влияния. **Результаты и обсуждение.** В разделе «Результаты и обсуждение» дается оценка значения МНПО в основных теориях международных отношений, показаны особенности политологической концептуализации МНПО, выделены формы отношений МНПО и государств, охарактеризована деятельность квази-МНПО и пр. **Заключение.** В «Заключении» предлагаются перспективные направления дальнейших исследований деятельности и функций прозападных МНПО.

**Ключевые слова:** международные неправительственные организации, квази-МНПО, мировая политика, теории международных отношений, национальная безопасность России.

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Research article

## Pro-Western International Non-Governmental Organizations as a Subject of Modern Political Science

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**Abstract. Introduction.** The study focuses on the activities of pro-Western international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) that may pose a threat to Russia's national security, as well as on their political science conceptualization. The work consists of several sections. The Introduction substantiates that the current adaptation of pro-Western INGOs to new geopolitical conditions requires a new political science understanding.

**Materials and methods.** The Materials and Methods section presents the empirical base and concepts that form the methodological basis of the study (the theory of transnationalism, concepts of global politics and network power, etc.). The Literature Review section examines three groups of publications: works devoted to 1) theoretical aspects of INGOs, 2) classifications of INGOs, 3) the use of INGOs by states as their instruments of influence. **Results and discussion.** The Results and Discussion section provides an assessment of the significance of INGOs in the main theories of international relations, shows the features of the political science conceptualization of INGOs, identifies the forms of relations between INGOs and states, characterizes the activities of quasi-INGOs, etc. **Conclusion.** The Conclusion suggests promising directions for further research into the activities and functions of pro-Western INGOs.

**Keywords:** international non-governmental organizations, quasi-INGOs, world politics, theories of international relations, national security of Russia

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**Introduction.** As multipolarity continues to assert itself, the patterns of interaction between power centers within transnational networks are shifting. States losing strength, the "old powers," are attempting to preserve established and advantageous models, while states gaining strength, the "new powers," are attempting, conversely, to transform or even completely destroy these models. Thus, states advocating a multipolar world are restricting the activities of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) controlled by the United States and its allies. In response, the latter are seeking to adapt these organizations to the new realities, but with their familiar functions and agency roles.

Currently, increasing control and restrictions on the activities of Western INGOs by non-Western countries are occurring not only as a result of a revision of interaction models within transnational networks, but also as a result of the increased threats these organizations generate. The list of cases in which INGOs have openly threatened sovereignty, territorial integrity, defense capability, and other political and state assets is constantly expanding. In the case of Russia, pro-Western INGOs have pursued objectives that run counter to its most important national interests and, if successful, could trigger destabilization processes. Given all this, it is necessary to study all risk-generating factors that persist and are emerging in the transnational sphere.

**Materials and Methods.** The empirical basis of the study consists of reports and reports from international non-governmental organizations (e.g., the Westminster Foundation for Democracy), databases and yearbooks from research organizations (e.g., the Union of International Associations), various regulatory acts, etc.

The course and results of this study were influenced by the theory of transnationalism (E. Vorobeva, M. Tedeschi, J. Jauhainen et al.) [1]. At the same time, the author relied on the theory of global politics (E. Heywood, B. Whiteham et al.) [2], distinguishing between the levels of INGO activity, and the theory of network power (D. Grewal et al.) [3], analyzing the network form of organization of interaction between INGOs and their counterparts. Considering the nature of INGO activity and the tools they use, the concept of "soft power" (D. Nye et al.) [4] was also important for the study.

Content analysis of news reports and social media posts, INGO reports and documentation, case study analysis and classification method were also used.

**Literature Review.** The literature related to the topic of this study can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of works that attempt to construct a theory of INGOs, examine their history, current problems and development prospects. Thus, V.L. Veriga, G.A. Vorobyov, A.P. Kolyadin, A.O. Naumov [5; 6; 7]; E. Bloodgood, M. Keck, G. Mitchell, K. Pallas, K. Sikkink, G. Schmitz [8; 9; 10] assess the role and place of INGOs in world politics, the foundations of their independent existence and their potential for socio-political change.

The second group consists of studies whose authors propose classifications of INGOs, compare their various types, or focus on one of them. Russian researchers V.V. Komleva, N.Yu. Silakov, V.V. Sutyrin, A.A. Shlikhter, Ya.V. Shchetinskaya [11; 12; 13; 14; 15] and others examine private philanthropy foundations, their international activities and development trends, as well as their role in the foreign policy of certain states. The same areas are covered in the works of foreign scientists D. Callahan, J. Clark, K. Orr, J. Petzinger, T. Jung [16; 17; 18] and others.

The third group includes works that position INGOs as instruments of influence for certain states. Thus, A.A. Velikaya, A.R. Goncharenko, A.M. Nekhorosheva, L.M. Sadovskaya, I.Yu. Somova, A.A. Tushkov [19; 20; 21; 22] in their publications emphasize those aspects of the activities of modern INGOs that relate to attempts at regime change, mobilization of protest participation, and escalation of ethnopolitical conflicts. Critical assessments of the activities of INGOs can be found in the works of such foreign authors as R. Arnove, M. Barker, I. Parmar, N. Pinede, J. Roelofs [23; 24; 25; 26].

**Results and discussion.** The study confirmed the hypothesis that many pro-Western INGOs, despite changes in contemporary world politics associated with the end of Western global dominance and the restrictions imposed on them, continue to pose a threat to Russia's national security, adapting their strategies to the new international political context without abandoning their anti-Russian stance.

The study concludes that INGOs are deprived of any meaningful attention in the conceptual constructs of neorealism and neoliberalism, since these paradigms focus on states concerned about their survival, represented as "black boxes" whose internal content does not influence their manifestations in the external environment.

Neorealists disbelieve in the possibility of international cooperation in security matters, citing the risk of deception, which could lead a trusted state to submission or destruction. States must constantly and independently ensure their own security, keeping an eye on their main competitors—other states. Against this central objective, interaction with other actors, including INGOs, is of minimal importance.

INGOs gain some conceptual scope within neoclassical realism, which postulates that an individual state's foreign policy is a consequence of its international structure and domestic influences, as well as the complex relationships between these factors. In other words, internal variables, such as INGO activity, can exert some influence on foreign policy formation.

Neoliberalism allows for the possibility of international cooperation through appropriate institutional development. However, the creation and functioning of international institutions is again linked exclusively to states, which control these processes. States are understood as the cause, and international institutions as merely the consequence. It turns out that neoliberalism, while recognizing the diversity of actors in global politics, also focuses on states, leaving no significant place for INGOs.

Constructivism, in turn, recognizes the potential for INGOs to participate in global politics, as they often generate and implement various ideas and agendas capable of inducing global political change. By playing specific roles in constructing the worldview and within various political platforms and forums, INGOs have acquired the status of an analytical unit within constructivism.

Constructivists consider INGOs to be bearers of a type of private power—moral power—that derives not from coercion but from the consent of those upon whom it is projected. At the same time, constructivism does not deny INGOs' possible dependence on states, which, through administrative or financial leverage, can delegate their functions to them or subordinate them entirely to further their own interests.

The study argues that INGOs can be considered a category of modern political science. What makes an INGO international is not the international composition of its members, but the international scope of its activities. In other words, an INGO is a non-governmental organization whose activities span two or more states. What makes an INGO non-governmental is not its

freedom from direct government control, but the form in which its activities are expressed. In other words, INGOs pursue more than just their own stated goals.

In the context of political science discourse, an INGO is an organization that pursues not only corporate interests but also the foreign policy interests of a particular state or group of states, and to this end, interacts with members of civil society and government structures in various countries using soft power tools. Indeed, many cases show that certain INGOs, rather than strengthening, actually weaken civil society in their target countries, elements of which, over time, become increasingly dependent on foreign aid, becoming mere agents of their patrons.

Today, INGOs are criticized for political shortcomings: a lack of legitimacy, a deficit in internal democracy, and counterproductive results associated with the struggle against undesirable regimes. At the same time, there is a growing awareness that INGOs, in their goals, are far from universal progress, being highly politicized actors in international relations.

As a result, the state-based approach to understanding their nature is gaining increasing popularity in political science, based on two assertions: 1) the effectiveness of INGOs depends not on their independence, but on the correct relations with donor states; 2) INGOs are not created independently, but with the formal and informal assistance of states that act as their patrons.

Modern INGOs perform three main functions, each with a specific political subtext: propaganda (dissemination of a certain set of ideas and construction of advantageous identities), sponsorship (provision of financial assistance to individuals and organizations that could potentially become a link in their networks of influence), and transnational (deepening of transnational relations that are favorable to them).

The study emphasizes that the priority of relations between INGOs and states has shifted. Contemporary political science distinguishes four forms of such relations: confrontation, cooperation, competition, and co-optation, based on the goals and means pursued and employed by INGOs and states.

Confrontational relationships arise when the goals and means of a given state and an INGO diverge. Many states restrict or completely ban INGO activities on their territory, fearing that they may pursue destructive objectives. At the same time, states sometimes view INGOs as partners who can provide useful services in various sectors, as they possess high potential for development assistance and the legitimacy necessary for the implementation of various socioeconomic initiatives. This suggests that INGOs and states may share similar goals and means, enabling them to form cooperative relationships.

In some cases, INGOs and states compete with each other as sources of information, regulators, and representatives. Thus, INGOs and states act as legitimate representatives of various groups in international governmental organizations (IGOs), becoming competing parties amid the so-called "democratic deficit" of state-created institutions.

Recently, states have frequently co-opted INGOs. In these relationships, the state, as the principal, delegates certain powers and functions to the INGO as its agent. The principal dictates to the agent where and how to conduct its activities and exercises control over its programs and services, thereby reducing its autonomy. At the same time, states can themselves create INGOs (quasi-INGOs), which are direct extensions of the state. The state finances and administers such INGOs, coordinating their governance structure, so they are deprived of the opportunity to pursue private interests.

In today's global reality, co-optation and confrontation prevail. Certain countries, seeking to maintain their dominance, instrumentalize the capabilities and resources of INGOs. Other countries, resisting such dominance, seek to block the use of INGOs as instruments of foreign policy influence. In the context of these processes, cooperation and competition as forms of interaction between INGOs and states are relegated to the background.

Quasi-INGOs are INGOs created by states to fulfill a range of tasks that they, the states, are unable or unwilling to carry out independently. As this dissertation demonstrates, the

majority of such pro-Western INGOs engage in "democracy promotion." In contemporary political science, "democracy promotion" is studied from two opposing perspectives: "enthusiastic" and "skeptical."

The first group of researchers (the "enthusiastic" supporters) believes that the United States is obligated to "promote democracy" globally, and its allies should assist them in every way possible, supporting all projects and institutions involved in this area. Essentially, they adopt a liberal institutional position, positing that the United States truly adheres to its stated ideals.

The second group of researchers (the "skeptical" critics), on the contrary, argue that the US, under the guise of "democracy promotion," is pursuing exclusively its own foreign policy interests. In other words, "democracy promotion" is nothing more than a US tool for achieving and maintaining a unipolar order and its own global hegemony.

Pro-Western quasi-INGOs engaged in "democracy promotion" rely on the idea of cultural superiority, the essence of which is that the criteria of democracy should be set by Western countries, while all others should play the role of subordinate objects in need of democratic development from the outside.

At the same time, pro-Western quasi-INGOs promote not a universal, ideal form of democracy, but a narrow, polyarchic one, presupposing the rule of a small group of people who attract the masses only to vote for leaders in elections carefully organized and controlled from above. In the service of Western geopolitical interests, they violate their professed principles by encouraging anti-democratic actions.

As the study has shown, the essence of the activities of quasi-MEDOs such as the National Endowment for Democracy or the Westminster Endowment for Democracy should be characterized not as "democracy promotion," but as "political assistance." This term encompasses the "democratic restoration" often found in contemporary Western foreign policy practice, addresses the contradiction caused by US aid to non-democratic countries, and also encompasses the technical aspects of American interventionism.

Western INGOs, in the form of philanthropic foundations, often serve as a means of maintaining Western hegemony, led by the United States. Such foundations can be interpreted as instruments of "cultural imperialism" or "soft power."

Understood as instruments of "cultural imperialism," philanthropic foundations represent actors expressing the interests of individual national elites, thereby distorting the free market of ideas. They wield significant political power, stemming from their funding and control of political think tanks, universities, and media outlets that exert a significant influence on political culture. Thanks to their resources and prestige, foundations easily form overt and covert coalitions with government bodies, UN agencies, educational institutions, and NGOs.

As instruments of "soft power," philanthropic foundations contribute to the formation of a positive image of the United States and the West as a whole. They form the core of a global "elite network" that performs two primary functions: 1) the production of knowledge that is disseminated among various national political elites under the guise of being universally recognized and legitimate, and the restriction of the circulation of alternative knowledge that threatens Western hegemony; 2) the socialization and integration of political elites into the hegemonic project using the full range of financial, communication, organizational, and other resources.

Based on an analysis of the destabilizing activity of private philanthropic INGOs such as the Open Society Foundations, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and others, the study concludes that it can take three forms: political-state (organizing protests and mediating in electoral campaigns), financial-economic (currency devaluations and stock market crashes), and socio-cultural (managing migration crises and escalating racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts).

At the same time, they support the infrastructure of globalization governance by promoting the neoliberal narrative in the media space, masking existing systemic and structural problems, suppressing alternative activism, etc.

The study demonstrates that pro-Western INGOs continue to pose a threat to Russia's national security by adapting their activities to new geopolitical realities.

In Russia, the political recognition of INGOs as a potential threat to national security occurred more than 12 years ago, when a law defining a non-profit organization as a foreign agent came into force in November 2012. Since then, a foreign agent has been defined as a non-profit organization engaged in political activity in Russia and funded by foreign sources. A little later (May 2015), the concept of an "undesirable organization" began to develop, defined as an organization that poses a threat to the foundations of the constitutional order, defense capability, and/or security of Russia.

For many years, pro-Western NGOs operating in Russia have carried out actions that, to varying degrees, contradict the interests of the Russian state. With the start of the special military operation in Ukraine, certain NGOs have demonstrated openly hostile intentions, opposing Russian authorities and armed forces.

Currently, a number of pro-Western INGOs have been declared undesirable in Russia. As of December 31, 2024, 195 foreign and international organizations are listed as undesirable in Russia. In 2024, 65 organizations were declared undesirable, 16 of which were INGOs. Of the 16 INGOs declared undesirable in Russia in 2024, nine were of American origin (56%).

An analysis of the activities of the John Smith Foundation, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Freedom House, and a number of other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) deemed undesirable in Russia shows that they focus on three distinct tasks: building a domestic intelligence network working in the interests of the West; anti-Russian propaganda and information campaigns discrediting Russian policy; and (pseudo) expert analysis, which, in the vast majority of cases, contains biased conclusions regarding Russia.

**Conclusion.** While the study addressed a number of issues to achieve its stated goal, some questions require further scientific exploration. These include the following.

1. This paper examines four forms of relations between INGOs and states: confrontation, cooperation, competition, and co-optation. Specifically, it concludes that the advocacy of human rights, which many INGOs engage in, often conceals efforts to destabilize the political situation in a given country, creating the basis for confrontation. However, this is not the only factor that generates confrontation, so research that attempts to organize and systematize all possible "points of contact" that generate confrontational and other forms of relations may be promising for expanding political knowledge.

2. This dissertation focuses on the threats posed by pro-Western INGOs to Russia's national security. Based on their various anti-Russian activities, pro-Western INGOs are grouped into three categories: intelligence, communications, and expert. Further research into the activities of such INGOs in other governmental contexts is needed. This research will provide material for a comparative analysis that will help clarify and expand existing knowledge about the destructive functions of INGOs.

3. This study focuses primarily on INGOs specializing in "political assistance" and philanthropy. However, the group of pro-Western INGOs is not limited to these types. For example, environmental and humanitarian INGOs operating within the context of a Western agenda and capable of posing threats to the national security of the Russian state can be mentioned. Given this, research projects focusing on the diversity of pro-Western INGOs with destabilizing potential and their comprehensive scientific classification would be relevant.

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