



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THEFT IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

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### Abstract

This article explores the role of theft within the framework of international law, emphasizing its importance in terms of global security, economic relations, and intergovernmental cooperation. As theft is increasingly committed within the scope of transnational crime, it necessitates a coordinated approach between international organizations and national legal systems. The article applies an analytical perspective based on international legal documents, institutions, and practical mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Theft, international law, crime, transnational crime, extradition, Interpol, crime prevention.

### Introduction

In today's globalized world, criminal acts—particularly those against property—are increasingly taking on an international character. Theft remains one of the most frequently occurring crimes and can manifest in various forms across international transport systems, customs zones, and transnational economic networks. This, in turn, elevates the relevance of international legal regulation, information exchange, extradition procedures, and international judicial jurisdiction.

This article analyzes the legal essence of theft, its place in international law, the role of international organizations, the experience of Uzbekistan and foreign countries, as well as the challenges and proposed solutions.

**1.1. General Legal Definition of Theft.** In many legal systems, theft is defined as an infringement on property. Article 169 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan defines theft as the covert appropriation of someone else's property. Similar definitions are found in the criminal codes of countries such as Russia, the USA, Germany, and Japan.

**1.2. The Concept of Theft in International Law.** While theft is not directly classified as an international crime in international law, it becomes a key concern when committed across borders or within international transport and financial





systems. The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime serves as a key legal foundation in this regard.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provides methodological, legal, and technical assistance to states in combating transnational crimes. UNODC protocols and guidelines are essential resources in the fight against theft.

**2.2. Interpol's Activities.** Through the Red Notice system introduced by Interpol, individuals suspected of theft can be placed under international search. Interpol's database provides accurate and prompt information on stolen goods, vehicles, and other assets.

### **2.3. The Role of the European Union and Other Regional Mechanisms**

The Europol agency within the European Union facilitates information sharing on crimes and joint investigations among member states. This approach serves as an effective mechanism to ensure the inevitability of punishment for theft-related offenses.

Globally, the transnational nature of criminality—including theft—is seen as a significant threat to international security. Consequently, international cooperation has become a strategic priority in combating such crimes. The legal foundations of this cooperation include extradition procedures, international treaties, judicial jurisdictions, and information exchange among specialized institutions.

**3.1. Extradition.** Extradition refers to the process of detaining a person hiding in another country and transferring them to the state where the crime was committed or where the investigation is ongoing. It is one of the key tools in combating international criminal activity. Uzbekistan is actively harmonizing its national legislation with international standards in this field.

In particular, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Extradition,” adopted on December 24, 2008, serves as the primary legal framework governing extradition matters. Under this law, individuals hiding in Uzbekistan who have committed theft or other serious crimes abroad may be handed over to foreign countries based on bilateral or multilateral international agreements.

Uzbekistan has also signed bilateral extradition agreements with CIS countries, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, Turkey, and many other states. In extradition procedures, the Office of the Prosecutor General of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborate closely. Additionally, this process must be





conducted in strict accordance with international legal norms, particularly respecting human rights guarantees.

One significant practical challenge related to extradition is the divergence in legal systems between states, bureaucratic hurdles, and occasional refusals to surrender individuals. In some cases, differences in how theft is defined—or a failure to recognize it as a criminal offense—may lead to extradition being denied. As a result, offenders may evade justice and move freely in jurisdictions with weaker legal frameworks.

**3.2. International Judicial Jurisdiction.** Under international law, theft typically falls under the jurisdiction of individual states. Nevertheless, when theft involves cross-border elements—such as occurring on international transport, involving multiple nationalities, or spanning several jurisdictions—it raises important jurisdictional questions.

While the International Criminal Court (ICC) does not prosecute theft per se, it plays a critical role in resolving jurisdictional disputes, delimiting authority in investigations, and aiding in the identification of offenders. Furthermore, inter-court cooperation—such as sharing evidentiary materials, identifying suspects, and recovering assets—gains increasing importance in proceedings involving international criminal activity. International courts and arbitration tribunals are becoming key actors in handling these matters.

At the same time, bodies like the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Interpol, the Council of Europe, and similar international organizations support global criminal justice initiatives. They assist in holding offenders accountable and in clarifying jurisdictional authority, as well as overseeing important elements such as forensic analysis, thereby strengthening the international legal mechanism.

Thus, the Republic of Uzbekistan should enhance cooperation with international judicial bodies and institutions, and integrate existing international legal norms into its national legislation to develop a more effective system for combating theft.

**4.1. International Experience.** In our globalized era, theft—especially offenses related to transport infrastructure, customs, and financial systems—not only threatens national security, but also international economic stability. To counter these threats, developed countries are adopting advanced, technology-driven systems.

For example, in the United States, agencies like the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) utilize artificial intelligence (AI) and big data technologies to detect threats at airports and train stations. Financial transactions are monitored in real time through automated systems, helping to detect fraud and theft.





In Germany, video surveillance and facial-recognition technologies are widely deployed at major transport hubs—such as Berlin and Frankfurt airports and train stations. These AI-enhanced systems enable rapid detection of criminal activity. Additionally, electronic customs declaration systems are actively used to monitor financial movements.

In Japan, the reliability of security systems is a key factor in combating financial crime. AI and automated monitoring are deployed not only in transport infrastructure but also in postal, courier, and banking systems. The swift, digital exchange of information among government agencies (e.g., customs, financial regulators, and the police) has established a robust institutional framework.

These national practices demonstrate that effectiveness in combating theft increases significantly when modern technology, legal mechanisms, and institutional cooperation are harmoniously integrated.

**4.2. Uzbekistan's Practices.** In recent years, the Republic of Uzbekistan has gradually implemented systematic measures across strategic sectors—such as transport, customs, and finance—to combat organized crime, and especially theft. These include adopting international best practices, adhering to international conventions, and integrating modern information and communication technologies. In the transport sector—particularly within Uzbekistan Railways CJSC, Uzbekistan Airways, and road transport networks—security cameras have been installed, and automated systems now regulate passenger and cargo movement. These steps play a critical role in preventing theft, tampering, or unauthorized removal of cargo.

Within the customs system, Uzbekistan's State Customs Committee has established an automated “single window” declaration system aligned with international standards, expediting information exchange with foreign customs agencies.

In the financial sector, integrated information systems connect the Central Bank and the State Tax Committee, enabling real-time monitoring of significant financial transactions. These systems can detect signs of theft or financial fraud and immediately alert law enforcement agencies.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor's Office have implemented AI-based forensic analysis tools and crime mapping technologies, allowing them to predict high-risk zones for criminal activity.

Thanks to these reforms, Uzbekistan is increasingly approaching international norms in its efforts to combat theft. However, there remains a strong need to further study foreign practices and harmonize national legislation and implementation measures.





In the customs system, control over cargo and goods is being strengthened through the implementation of an automated declaration system based on the “Single Window” principle. The State Customs Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan has developed information systems that comply with international standards, which have significantly accelerated data exchange with foreign customs authorities.

In the financial sector, an integrated information system between the Central Bank of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the State Tax Committee allows for real-time monitoring of large-scale financial transactions. Through these systems, signs of theft and financial fraud can be quickly identified, and relevant data is transmitted to law enforcement authorities.

Moreover, forensic analysis software and crime mapping systems based on artificial intelligence have been introduced in the internal affairs and prosecutor’s offices. These tools allow for the prediction of high-risk areas where criminal activity is more likely to occur.

Considering the above, the reforms implemented by the Republic of Uzbekistan in the fight against theft are gradually aligning with international legal norms. However, alongside the existing achievements, there is a need for deeper analysis of foreign practices and further improvement of national legislation and practical measures.

**5.1. Current Challenges.** In today’s globalized world, theft crimes often possess transnational characteristics, crossing state borders. Therefore, combating them effectively requires the use of coordinated international mechanisms. However, in practice, several challenges hinder the effectiveness of such efforts:

- **Legal differences in international cooperation:** Discrepancies in how theft is classified, penalized, and procedurally handled across different countries lead to difficulties in conducting joint investigations and judicial proceedings.
- **Jurisdictional conflicts in investigation and trial:** When a crime is committed in one country and the suspect hides in another, disputes may arise over which country holds judicial jurisdiction. This can delay or entirely obstruct the investigative process.

**5.2. Recommendations.** To eliminate the above challenges and strengthen the legal foundations for combating theft crimes internationally, the following proposals and recommendations are put forward:

1. **Recognition of theft as a transnational crime:** A proposal should be initiated at the level of the United Nations and other international organizations to



include theft—especially its cross-border and organized forms—in the list of particularly dangerous transnational crimes.

**2. Strengthening technical cooperation with Interpol and UNODC:** It is essential to fully integrate Uzbekistan's law enforcement agencies into international information systems, such as Interpol's I-24/7 system, and enhance their technical and technological capabilities.

**3. Harmonizing national legislation with international conventions:** It is advisable to revise the provisions of the Criminal Code related to theft in accordance with international standards, particularly the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Convention).

**4. Expanding extradition agreements:** It is necessary to broaden the scope of existing extradition agreements and sign new bilateral and multilateral treaties to prevent criminals from evading justice. In this regard, cooperation with the CIS, SCO, and other regional organizations is of particular importance.

**5. Participating in international projects to enhance security in transport systems:** To reduce theft crimes in rail, air, and maritime transport, it is necessary to implement electronic surveillance systems, safety monitoring technologies, and automated systems for monitoring hazardous goods, based on international best practices.

## CONCLUSION

The crime of theft is increasingly being recognized not only as a threat to the interests of individuals and property owners but also as a global issue that endangers international security, economic stability, free trade, and the principles of the rule of law. In particular, due to the rapid acceleration of globalization, the digital economy, and cross-border trade, theft-related crimes have become more complex, making their detection and prosecution increasingly dependent on international cooperation.

Although there is currently no international legal framework that directly defines theft as an international crime, it occupies a significant position within the structure of transnational crime. Comprehensive measures are being taken to combat this offense through the activities of the United Nations' Palermo Convention, Interpol, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and other international organizations. These measures include extradition procedures, international information exchange, joint investigations and inquiries, and the implementation of advanced technologies, all of which contribute to the development of an effective approach.

In conclusion, one of the key factors in combating theft is the close coordination and effective integration of national and international mechanisms. By deepening





cooperation with the international community in the fight against global crime, Uzbekistan can strengthen not only its internal security but also its position within the international legal system.

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