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States, International Organisations and Strategic Partnerships

Book review: Lucyna Czechowska, Andriy Tyushka, Agata Domachowska, Karolina Gawron-Tabor, Joanna Piechowiak-Lamparska (Eds.), *Państwa, Organizacje Międzynarodowe i Partnerstwa Strategiczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2019, pp. 693.

Some of the most promising and fascinating research problems for International Relations scholars to work on, arise from the need to identify, define and explain new (or evolved) phenomena produced by the constant flux and evolution of international politics. The growing popularity of Strategic Partnerships (SPs), as a specific way of organizing relations between actors of international relations in the post-Cold War world, creates demand for this type of research. Such is the origin of the reviewed book, which presents the results of a research project called *Strategic Partnership between a State and an International Organization* (SPaSIO) undertaken by Strategic Partnership Group (SPG) composed of young researchers from Nicholai Copernicus University. The authors have adopted ambitious research goals. First, to “design and present an ideal model of a strategic partnership between a state and an international organization, composed of a definition and a set of constitutive characteristics capturing the essence of this category” (p. 12). The second one concerns “the creation of an analytical framework – a tool for assessing the quality of particular strategic partnerships operating in the international arena – and testing it using empirically observable changes in 14 case studies of strategic partnerships” (p. 12). These aims have been successfully realized thanks to well thought methodological and theoretical basis and meticulous testing through case studies.

The book is divided into three main parts: theory, model, and case studies. The first one provides a comprehensive review of academic literature concerning strategic partnerships and outlines the entire project’s theoretical basis. Here the authors have presented and

commented on the full scope of literature concerning the subject matter. Thanks to that, the reader can understand both SPs' growing role in post-Cold War international politics and the state of scientific research on them. The project correctly identifies the gaps in existing scholarship and moves in to fill them. It answers the need to conceptualize and operationalize SPs in a more thorough manner. The spotlight is also turned on a specific type of SPs, those connecting states and International Organizations (IOs). That is an area that has attracted considerably less attention than state-to-state SPs. At this point, the authors outline the theoretical basis of the project. They decided on an approach combining realist and constructivist IR theories. Such theoretical heterogeneity should be welcomed. However, it leaves the reviewer wondering why liberal institutional theory has not been adopted as the third pillar of this theoretical foundation. Considering that this theoretical school focuses on mechanisms and determinants of international cooperation, it could have potentially enriched this research approach.

The second part of the book provides a detailed overview of the SPaSIO model, which forms the entire research endeavor's core. Both the efforts and skill put by the research team into designing and refining the model are impressive and admirable. It testifies to methodological and theoretical maturity and proficiency of its authors. The model assumes that Strategic Partnership is a function of two dependent variables: readiness for cooperation and cooperation's establishment. Both of these are further predicted by two independent variables each. For readiness for cooperation, they are the convergence of strategic goals and convergence of strategic roles. Cooperation's establishment is tied to exceptional bonds and regularized bilateral strategic interactionism. The model also includes an intervening variable, mediating between dependent and independent variables – trust between partners. The model's usefulness is strengthened because every one of the five identified variables is further conceptualized through a set of indicators. Every indicator is then operationalized by a set of metrics. Thanks to that ambitious and very well thought through process, the authors have created a detailed matrix of metrics that can be combined to measure a particular SP's quality.

The model described above is put to use in the third part of the book, which presents 14 case studies. They include SPs linking different states with four IOs (NATO, EU, ASEAN, and the Andean Community – CAN). It must be stressed that every case study is analyzed through a standardized matrix of the model's indicators and metrics. The rich diversity of case studies and meticulous application of the underlying framework of analysis generate an extensive database that validates the research team's baseline assumptions. Most of the data and findings generated through the project are available on the SPGs website (<http://www.spg.umk.pl/>). It is an excellent aid for further research.

In its entirety, the book is a valuable resource for several groups of readers. First, for those interested in Strategic Partnerships as a form of international relations, it offers a deep and nuanced understating of the phenomenon. Second, chapters dealing with particular case studies can be valuable sources for students and researchers of the role and policies of

particular states and IOs. Third, International Relations (and Social Sciences students more generally) can look to parts I and II of the book for an excellent example of combining proper methodological and theoretical insight to create adequate research tools. The only element in the book as such which, in the reviewer's opinion, could have improve its reception, would be to summarize the conclusions in a more compact and accessible manner for a casual reader. As it stands, they are presented to a large degree through equations and data tables. That, while scientifically desirable, may limit their audience.

It is also important to note some inevitable limitations of the adopted research model. The matrix used to judge particular SPs' quality uses easily observable and measurable indicators, e.g. official documents and statements. For that reason, it may not fully capture the underlying political processes which have a significant impact on the SP but inevitably unfold largely behind the scenes, which make them not easily accessible to researchers. It may lead to such conclusions as the one presented on p. 664 when it is stated that the South China Sea dispute has not impacted the ASEAN- China partnership as negatively as it might have been expected. As the reviewer has studied this issue in some detail, he has to point out that the SCS dispute had (and still has) a tremendous and adverse impact on relations between PRC and ASEAN states. However, Beijing prefers to deal with this issue through bilateral interactions with other claimant states and makes its best to keep it muted in the multilateral fora. That is why the analysis of official declarations issued in the ASEAN-China format may not reveal the full extent of the tension and conflict. In a very prominent sign of this tensions, at least thrice during the last decade, ASEAN or ASEAN supported joint meetings failed to end with a joint statement, due to controversies over including references to Chinese behavior in the SCS.

As presented in the reviewed publication, the entire research project provides food for thought and raises questions for further research. It shows that strategic partnerships proliferated in the post-Cold War world because they are, in essence, a form of cooperation more flexible and looser than traditional instruments, such as alliances or IOs. That is why, for many actors, it may seem more suitable for the fluid and multifaceted international order of the last three decades. This trend is visible throughout numerous initiatives featuring prominently in the international landscape of the year 2020. We can mention here the developing security cooperation through Quadrilateral Dialogue (including Australia, India, Japan, and the United States) or US president-elect Joe Biden's proposal for a (still ill-defined) forum for cooperation between democracies. The book also makes an important point in observing that SPs between states and IOs are somewhat different from their state-state counterparts. While the SPaSIO project provides a comparative study of SPs involving partners from many corners of the world, it can be a basis for analyzing different visions and modes of institutionalized cooperation. In the reviewer's opinion, it would be extremely interesting to compare SPs' effectiveness created by western IOs (NATO and EU) and non-Western ones (ASEAN, CAN). It is worth remembering that, for example, EU, ASEAN, and CAN reflect different ideas and approaches concerning the functions, processes, and outcomes of institutionalized international cooperation.