



Prepare for a 'multi-partner' world! **REORDERING ORDER**


If decision-makers are to cope with a rapidly emerging polycentric world characterized by compounding complexity and declining constitutionalism, new forms of statecraft are needed. Partnerships may well be the way forward.

The international system is in a state of flux. New powers are rising and unruly actors are entering the international stage and established practices and multilateral institutions appear inappropriate for meeting the challenges ahead. In short the number of challenges appears to be growing while the influence of the Western rule-based liberal order appears to be declining.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Western powers need to scale back aspirations of universalizing liberal values through partnership diplomacy and work with diverse emerging powers to find common ground and agree on the norms underpinning a new rules-based order.
- The West will have to recognize opportunities and challenges and apply strategies for partnership diplomacy to achieve the most formal scope of organization and the thickest form of institutionalization possible.
- Policy-makers should recognize the value of 'flying under the radar' in issue specific partnerships through personal and professional networks.

The Value of partnership may be precisely in the fast that it represents the maximum level of cooperation possible



Partnerships offer an opportunity for ‘flying under the radar’ of political constraints and perhaps in time overcome some of the divisions standing in the way of more formal and institutionally ticked forms of cooperation.

What lies ahead is a new polycentric international system that is more diverse in its distribution of power and principles about how order should be maintained both domestically and internationally. The peaceful arrival of such a polycentric international system will require compromise, tolerance and recognition of political diversity – the use of partnership-diplomacy as a new form of statecraft can be an important tool in this process.

The growing use of partnership diplomacy

The use of partnership as a foreign policy tool appears to be fully recognized in policy-circles. In recent years terms like ‘strategic partnership’, ‘essential partnership’, ‘enduring partnership’ and ‘operational partnership’ have started to appear in diplomatic circles and, partnership as a tool of statecraft is already a common practice.

Partnership was a keystone in the first Obama Administration. It was recognized that America would not be able to meet the threats of the 21st century alone, and that a renewed American leadership would require ‘rebuilding alliances, partnerships and institutions to confront common threats and enhance common security’. The policy was most clearly articulated by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, as a move to establish a ‘cooperative architecture’ leading to a ‘multi-partner world rather than a multi-polar world’.

The EU’s Eastern Partnership, the current negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) as well as many other bilateral partnerships referred to as ‘strategic partnerships’ bear witness to the perceived importance of partnerships as a policy tool. Moreover, partnership-diplomacy is not just

something that goes on between states. Partnerships are also being established both above and below the state-to-state level. For example, public-private partnerships are increasingly utilized between states and private actors in a myriad of issue areas, and partnerships between different international organizations such as between NATO and EU, or between the EU and the African Union are in the making.

Partnerships as ‘nice to have’ or ‘need to have’

One of the questions to be asked is why the sudden plethora of different partnerships? The official answer from Western policy-makers is that ‘it is good to talk’ and that cooperation has an inherent value. However, behind the Western rhetoric is also an assumption that Western values can prevail through the cooperation that will take place in partnerships, and that partnership diplomacy therefore may be a useful tool for cementing Western (liberal) preferences for a rule-based order. For that reason partnerships are clearly ‘nice to have’.

However, the harsh reality is more likely to be that partnership is a necessary policy tool under conditions of declining constitutionalism. Today different visions for global governance exist side by side, and an increasing number of important actors such as Russia and China (and Islamic State), reject the values underpinning liberal order. Even democracies such as India and Brazil are at best ambivalent about liberal order and disagree with key liberal principles such as the Responsibility to Protect. Moreover, it cannot be denied that the liberal model has not lived up to its promise of freedom and prosperity – even in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq where promises were made.

The latter has led to a decline in the magnetism of liberal order. Under these conditions partnership is clearly a 'need to have' tool for trying to halt or reverse the negative trend.

Clarifying a fuzzy concept

But it is not enough to ask why partnerships suddenly abound. It is also necessary to ask what is meant by the term because although partnership is an everyday concept, its meaning as a policy tool is by no means clear. For example, does a partnership need to rest on shared values and what kind of organizational framework is needed for a partnership to work? Why is it that some quite modest partnerships are referred to as 'strategic' while others – even very important partnerships like the transatlantic relationship – are not even awarded the title 'partnership'?

At a minimum it seems necessary to differentiate between diverse partnerships according to their organizational scope and their institutional thickness. In terms of organizational scope, partnerships can range from traditional multilateral or bilateral organizational modes rooted in formal treaties to the less formal modes of organization in what might be termed 'minilateral' (the smallest possible number within a multilateral setting to have the largest possible impact), 'maxilateral' (between collective entities such as regional organizations) and 'plurilateral' (cross-cutting across different layers and structures with shared functional dimensions).

A MULTIPOLAR OR A POLYCENTRIC INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM?

Many commentators suggest that the world is returning to multipolarity following the so-called 'unipolar moment'. However, this analysis overlooks that the primary states in the multipolar order (1815-1914) were in agreement about the main principles of the international order. Such agreement is not present in the order that is currently evolving. A polycentric system therefore is one where there is diversity both in terms of power and principles.

The institutional thickness will depend on the extent to which the partnership is based on characteristics ranging from 'thin' institutional ties such as shared practices and shared interests to increasingly 'thicker' institutional ties based on shared rules, values, identity or culture. The further along this continuum the partnership moves, the deeper the institutional thickness is likely to be. The distinction is important because it highlights that partnership – in any depth or scope - need not be based on what might be termed gemeinschaft type relationships rooted in different forms of community association, but can equally well be based on a gesellschaft business type relationship. In other words although partnership can imply some form of friendship, this is not necessarily so.

CATEGORIES OF PARTNERSHIP

Scope/Depth	Practice	Interests	Rules	Values	Identity	Culture
Bilateral						
Multilateral						
Minilateral						
Maxilateral						
Plurilateral						

The benefits of partnership diplomacy

The final question to be asked is what can realistically be achieved through partnership diplomacy? In light of the clearly failed partnership with Russia, the difficulties in reaching a final agreement in negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the growing concerns about the prospects for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the European Partnership Agreements and difficulties in establishing a number of strategic partnerships with rising powers, the benefits of partnership diplomacy can be difficult to glimpse. To be fair the benefits are not tangible and the value of partnership may be precisely in the fact that it represents the maximum level of cooperation possible in difficult circumstances. Liberal states will invariably prefer formal rules-based, multilateral or bilateral arrangements, preferably based on shared values. But if such an outcome is not possible, then partnerships offer an opportunity for 'flying under the radar' of political constraints and perhaps in time overcome some of the divisions standing in the way of more formal and institutionally ticked forms of cooperation. After all forging constructive relationships across dividing lines, is one of the main achievements of the Western liberal order. For the moment partnership diplomacy seems the best available option for moving towards the goal of maintaining a rules-based cooperative international order.

FURTHER READING

Trine Flockhart, Charles Kupchan, Christina Lin, Bartholomiej Nowak, Patrick Quirk, Lanxin Xiang, **Liberal Order in a Post-Western World**, 2014, Transatlantic Academy

Charles Kupchan, **No One's World**, Oxford University Press, 2012

Angela Stent, **The Limits of Partnership**, Princeton University Press, 2014

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