Towards a Good Security Studies Textbook


Good Polish language social science methodology textbooks (e.g., Nowak, 2006) are often considered by the first years to be too difficult to get a grasp of them. The same students are also reluctant to read more straightforward but not less valuable books in English (e.g., Punch, 2014). In fact, it is not easy task to find for them a reading that would be both worthwhile and highly accessible. Teoretyczne i metodologiczne podstawy problemów z zakresu bezpieczeństwa: Podręcznik akademicki seems to fulfil the requirements. In this new Polish language security studies textbook, Zbigniew Ścibiorek and Zenon Zamiar gathered ten contributions which tackle the fundamental issues concerning empirical, theoretical, and methodological aspects of security.

Chapters 1–6 concentrate on the links between theoretical and empirical approaches towards security. Mariusz Wiatr shows the importance of national interest changeability while the goals of Polish strategy of national security are established (p. 26). He also discusses the strategies and conceptions of security. Robert Szandrocho delves into the system of security and the states of exception. It is the accessible review of the most important questions in the state security field. Marek Kulczycki sheds considerable light on the defence system of Poland. Worth emphasizing is that he clearly determines the relations between the semantic fields of the system and its sub-systems (p. 89). Zenon Zamiar and Barbara Kaczmarszyk present the crisis management in Polish system of security by introducing its fundamental conceptual
network and key documents. This chapter charts the directions of the analyses of crisis management plans but it avoids talking over some gaps in them, e.g., the lack of legal procedures and instructions which would instruct the crisis management subjects how to build a network of security. Witold Rynkiewicz characterizes the notion, essential features, and functions of critical infrastructure. He also depicts an image of Polish critical infrastructure in a broad international context. Finally, Anatol Tichoniuk puts forward international organizations in the world and regional system of security.

Nevertheless, one may expect the more deliberate use of categories, than it is presented in this part of volume, from the textbook in order to give its readers a lead. Even though, in practice, some words which may carry different meanings, e.g., a country and a state (p. 25) as well as a notion and a term (p. 8), are utilized interchangeably, it is important to teach students good scientific habits of being precise in the process of scientific communication. Secondly, although crisis management defined by the law is not a system, it is sometimes called a system (p. 128). It would be interesting to show students why it is and is not a system. Finally, it is significant to teach them that social science theoretical categories are much more useful than colloquialisms when research fields are examined. For example, power should not be ontologised (p. 49) because it is not a social subject.

The second part of the volume, which embraces chapters 7–11, handles the methodological problems of research on security. Zbigniew Ścibiorek addresses the question about the identity of security studies. He approaches the topic philosophically and moves readers into scientific reflection on security. Marek Bodziany thoroughly traces the stages of a process of research on security and shows how to apply quantitative and qualitative methods. These contributions lucidly and substantively elaborate particular components of a research process. In the last chapter, Bodziany conducts a case study which demonstrates how to formulate the conception of research on security issues. The ambitiously constructed research problems concern the extent of influence importance (pp. 315, 316, 319, 323) but the research project fails to propose the tools to measure it. This part of project is worth rethinking but the case is illustrative and thus accomplishes its aim.

Despite some minor drawbacks, the textbook is strongly recommendable to students, academics, and all those who are interested in dealing with the fundamental problems of security. Overall, the volume may be useful pending the introduction courses of: crisis management, methodology and theory of security studies, and security system, as it is easy-accessible, highly readable, and covers the most meaningful questions in their fields.
References:


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