"Applying Carl Schmitt to Global Puzzles: Identity, Conflict and the Friend/Enemy Antithesis,"

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Overview: Using the political and legal thought of Carl Schmitt as a main departure point, this paper applies Schmitt’s seminal friend-enemy antithesis to current global problems and demonstrates his pertinence to the field of international relations.

Keywords: Schmitt, identity, friend/enemy distinction, violence, terrorism, international relations

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Applying Carl Schmitt to Global Puzzles: Identity, Conflict and the Friend/Enemy Antithesis

Emma R. Norman

This paper demonstrates the broad appeal and usefulness of the political and legal thought of Carl Schmitt to scholars of international relations by applying his seminal friend-enemy antithesis to current global problems as well as to current IR theories used to negotiate them. I argue that Schmitt’s contemporary appeal lies, first, in his insistence that collective identity is necessarily formed through conflict (enmity); and second, that identity lies at the very base of what motivates behavior on the international stage (at the sub-national, national and transnational levels). By implication, Schmitt’s theories offer some fresh insights into the sources and nature of nationalism, terrorism and war in the new millennium. Part two illustrates briefly where a Schmittian view can disclose some important aspects of international events and circumstances that are not so visible when approached from the perspective of the “usual suspects” in IR theory.

Schmitt’s theory of collective identity and conflict is not for the faint-hearted. It is a highly provocative, often disturbing view of the world written by an anti-Semitic jurist who became the legal expert of the German Nazi Party. For these reasons, Schmitt’s work was much maligned in all fields except constitutional law until fairly recently.\(^1\) Only in the 1980s were historians, political scientists and politicians finally able to disentangle their perception of the man from what turned out to be his rather precise and scholarly conceptual work. The global explosion in interest did not occur until the translation of Schmitt’s key works in the 1980s and 1990s from the German into English, French and Spanish. Many are still unavailable in English, but the interest in, and importance of, his work in political science continues to grow with each published translation and is now well accepted in the field. This appeal is, to date, far less accepted in the area of International Relations. I argue here that there are many reasons both to question why this

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From 1933-1970 “the mere mention of Schmitt’s name usually aroused such hostility that no objective discussion was possible.” George Schwab, “Introduction to the 2nd Edition,” The Challenge of the Exception (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989) vi.
is the case and to challenge the mistrust his work so often generates in all but the fringes of the
discipline.

This paper first introduces the context in which the international appeal of Schmitt’s work
is situated and delineates the key points in his argument concerning the friend-enemy distinction.
Section two illustrates very briefly some of the key uses his thought can have in three areas
prominent in current International Relations: how it enriches certain IR theories; how it can flesh
out existing claims in the literature about how concrete collective identities are formed; and how
it can provide insights that encourage a more accurate understanding of recent developments in
the concept of war and its relation to terrorism.

Since this paper is a first step in a much wider project, a main aim is to use it to isolate
research areas that can, in the future, guide a more detailed set of studies, arguments and
applications than I am able to offer here. In this very general attempt to see how Schmitt’s views
can be usefully applied to some contemporary global puzzles, I do not wish to imply, and I
certainly do not argue, that Schmitt’s approaches should be viewed as the main or only
explanatory elements of the global phenomena discussed here. Schmitt provides a perspective,
and a provocative one at that, but it is one among several perspectives that are valid insofar as
they are useful in helping us to better understand certain contemporary global puzzles and
challenges. My position is merely that Schmitt’s approaches, conceptualizations and arguments
are best used in tandem with alternate theories of international relations rather than as their
replacements. For all these reasons, it should come as no surprise that Schmitt’s arguments are
not advocated wholesale in this paper. Like many who write on this thinker, I do so not because I
admire his political views or the conclusions of his theory, but because tucked away among those
conclusions are some extremely valuable insights into the nature of the current international
order. It is the initial elements of these insights I hope to draw attention to here.
I. Literature Review and Theoretical Groundwork

Situating Schmitt

Recognition of the importance and impact of Schmitt’s work has not been quick to surface in the field of IR theory. At the margins, the relevance of Schmitt has very recently been stressed in work on critical theory and its poststructuralist variants, in international law research, and in some mainstream debates over the last three or four years—largely a result of the increasing importance of the sub-discipline international political theory. However, an increase in traction of this thinker toward the more mainstream elements of IR has been dogged by the fact that since the early 1980s Schmitt’s “very carefully formulated concepts became catchy slogans,” which were often truncated and misappropriated by political leaders, ideologues, and commentators to serve and justify their own ends. The extremism of Schmitt’s arguments has been cited as a main 


reason why his work has managed to captivate not only members of the Neo-conservative right of the political spectrum, but also those on the radical left.

It is surprising that so few IR scholars have hitherto found Schmitt’s views to be worthy of notice, for his theory is remarkably relevant to the field, especially in an era of globalization. In fact, Schmitt’s work speaks directly or indirectly to a range of issues that even the most conventional internationalist would find hard to disregard: state sovereignty, critiques of liberal universalism, humanitarian intervention, universal human rights, cosmopolitanism, global governance and citizenship, national and human security, international law, legitimacy and war, terrorism, counterterrorism, nationalism and other forms of collective identity, identity politics, critiques of just war theory and even peacekeeping. He has also been described as “the founding theorist of a ‘geo-political’ framework of international relations.”

Clearly, no single theorist can provide a panacea for the ills of the international order, but the scope of this list suggests that Schmitt engages several ideas that are elemental in the discipline. This paper examines only the most fundamental: identity and its relation to conflict. It is Schmitt’s view of collective identity as the driving force for human groupings and regroupings, and his notion that the possibilities of enmity and war are intrinsic to this process, that render his work a key resource for IR theorizing in the new millennium. Based on elements of political realism and group identity construction, the potential explanatory power of Schmitt’s paradigm

7 Including Paul Edward Gottfried, and, through Leo Strauss, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle. Critics of the Neo-conservative right almost always include Leo Strauss in this list. Strauss was a good friend and colleague of Schmitt, but critiqued his work soundly on a number of occasions.

8 Including the prominent European poststructuralists Slavoj Zizek, Chantal Mouffe, and Jacques Derrida as well as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and Giorgio Agamben. For a discussion of why Schmitt appeals so widely to scholars of politics, see Alan Wolfe, “A Fascist Philosopher,” B16.

and its applicability to today’s “War on Terror” is hard to ignore. I argue here that Schmitt can contribute much to our theoretical grasp of how identities are formed and reformulated in an international context and how this context can quickly succumb to violence—which occurs through a process that has been embraced under the contemporary banner of “identity politics.”

**Freund vs Feind: Schmitt’s Theory of Identity**

So what is it, exactly, that renders Schmitt’s views so attractive to internationalists today? For both the hostile and the sympathetic reader, the growing appeal of Schmitt lies in two of his premises: collective identity is central to human life, and the construction and preservation of that identity is contingent upon an inter-national context.

In his own time, perturbed by the circularity in legal arguments that sought to define what is political by equating it merely with the state, Schmitt worried that the traditional “politics = state” definition—rooted in the works of Machiavelli, Bodin and Hobbes—could hold only as long as the sovereign modern European state on which it was grounded existed intact. Given that in 1932 Schmitt was witnessing how historical forces were ripping the German state asunder, undermining its sovereignty and rapidly destabilizing an international order suffering a crisis of legitimacy, he was all the more dubious about the validity of the ”politics = state” assumption. He

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10 This argument is made by Kelanic, “Carl Schmitt, the Friend-Enemy Distinction and International Relations Theory,” 2008.

11 The ideas expressed here can have a bearing on current identity politics of varying kinds. However, Schmitt is concerned with exclusion as a crucial element of identity construction itself, rather than as a consequence of belonging to certain groups that might experience exclusion (which is more commonly termed “identity politics” today).

12 “The state thus appears as something political, the political as something pertaining to the state.” Schmitt, The Concept of the Political trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 20.

13 Of the WWI defeat of Germany, humiliation under the Treaty of Versailles, reparations, and their economic ramifications, the collapse of the Weimar Republic, the Wall Street Crash, and the Communist victory in Moscow.
therefore developed a truly inter-national concept of the political which acknowledged that political actions could originate from groups within or beyond the state. In short, Schmitt detached the concept of the political from its ultimate reference to the faltering institution of the state, and connected it instead to the experience of identifying with or against a nation (or other non-state collective identities).

In an attempt to capture conceptually the new political reality of the early 1930s, Schmitt sought a category for identifying specifically political actions and motives that did not derive from reference to other criteria (such as the sovereign state). He did this by reducing the foundational distinctions in different spheres of human life to what he maintained were their lowest common denominators. In *The Concept of the Political* (1932), Schmitt famously argued that every sphere of human endeavor is characterized by an irreducible antithesis: profitable and unprofitable in economics, beautiful and ugly in aesthetics, sacred and profane in religion, good and evil in morality and friend and enemy in the political. None of these distinctions, he said, can or should be directly reduced to, or confused with, the others.\(^{14}\)

The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is nevertheless the other, the stranger… existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible… Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent’s way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one’s own form of existence.\(^{15}\)

It is not difficult to see how the political is viewed here as a result of a fundamental struggle in the quest for achieving identity, where identity is based on “a relation of negativity.”\(^{16}\)

Schmitt’s clear focus on the enemy as more significant than the friend underscores the pivotal

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15 Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 27.

claim that while inclusion and exclusion always logically accompany each other (to say ‘us’ presumes a ‘them’), for Schmitt it is exclusion that is crucial in creating group identities. Identifying the “them” is required for the “us” to be recognizable.17 It was this very construct that informed the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003, but it also explains why so few states chose to join the U.S. “coalition of the willing” in support of this military action.

The friend side of the equation is also important—not merely to preserve the distinction, but because it highlights that a people’s sense of belonging is tested by being prompted to take sides. So whenever a group engages in ‘taking sides,’ we are actively constructing our group identities and thus engaging in the political. The more intense the degree of unification or separation, the more political the group becomes.18 Yet it is the alignment and the decision about who is the enemy and about whether or not to wage war against that adversary, rather than fighting the war itself, that galvanizes a collective identity and thus constitutes the political. However, and in contrast to U.S. Neo-conservative thinking and decision-making on the Iraq invasion, Schmitt was careful to emphasize that “[t]he politics of avoiding war”19 was one plausible outcome of his model.20

The salient idea for international relations concerns the necessary connection between identity and potential conflict. While the extreme case (physical conflict) is not required to occur, for Schmitt the possibility of inter-state relations escalating into violence must exist if functional

17 There is a clear debt to Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic in this intersubjective understanding of identity requiring otherness—one reason why Schmitt’s work fits so well with critical and poststructuralist approaches in International Relations.

18 Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, 29.

19 Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, 35.

20 Schmitt takes care to distinguish himself soundly from the usual misreadings of Clausewitz on this. The Concept of the Political 34, 34fn. Schmitt points out that Clausewitz’s phrase is almost always misquoted and misunderstood. The correct quote is “War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse with a mixture of other means.” Carl von Clausewitz, On War, vol. 3, trans. Colonel J.J. Graham, ed. Colonel F.N. Maude (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Company, 1908), 120.
group identities are to be formed and preserved.\(^2\) For him, humans are only really prepared to take responsibility for their lives, values and the groups they identify with, if the possibility of losing all these things is real. To continue with the example of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, U.S. arguments about the all-or-nothing stakes in fighting the war on terror were simply not compelling for the majority of countries that refused to join the coalition of the willing.

But Schmitt’s tacit assumption here is even more radical. The friend-enemy distinction is the most fundamental of human antitheses for Schmitt precisely because he felt that the threat of losing one’s identity is the strongest (if not the only) motivation for a human being to choose to die for their beliefs. This sounds inconsistent and highly contestable at first: dying, of course, ends one’s identity—unless one’s particular beliefs indicate otherwise. Yet there is a difference between losing it and ending it. The idea starts to make more sense when we consider that the threat of remaining alive and yet being forced to subsume one’s identity under that of another group in times of conflict has been a perennial motive for dying for one’s “country,” nation, religious or ideological views, cultural values whether one is a professional or conscripted soldier, insurgent, suicide-bomber, or civilian. From Yugoslavia to Rwanda, this has been the underlying force in the fragmentation and collapse of these states amidst waves of inter-ethnic violence.

The basic point to tease out of Schmitt here is that “country,” nation, religion, cultural values are secondary tokens of what he saw as their underlying *raison d’être*: identity. “[I]t would be senseless to wage war for purely religious, purely moral, purely juristic, or purely economic motives…War today is in all likelihood none of these. This obvious point is mostly confused by

\(^2\) Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 33.
the fact that religious, moral and other antitheses can intensify to political ones and can bring about the decisive friend-or-enemy constellation.”22

The conclusion to be drawn from this gives an interesting new twist to the centrality of security in international relations theory and practice. Underlying Schmitt’s position is the assumption that it is not so much a Hobbesian freedom from fear of violent death that motivates our search for security (which rests on an individualist assumption of self-preservation Schmitt did not accept), but rather the need to belong to a clearly defined group. The way to define any group is to contrast it with an “other.” However, Schmitt’s emphasis is on the extreme form of “othering”: clear definition comes only where the “self-other” relation can potentially intensify into a “friend-enemy” one.

The main point is easiest to understand in terms of the actions between nation-states, some of which do escalate to war for reasons that are as much (if not more) to do with preserving and re-clarifying a threatened group identity as they are pursuing economic interests or defending a set of moral values. This is, I think, precisely what underpins so much of the global uneasiness that met the “moral justifications” for the war on terror given by Bush et al. Yet it exposes those justifications from a perspective different to the familiar realist line that the moral discourse merely functions to cloak “baser” motives of economic self-interest, which are justifiable on rational grounds, though not always on moral ones.23 A Schmittian view would add that such economic motives also serve as a cloak for the more elemental motive of preserving a threatened group identity which is even less open to justification on either moral or rational grounds.


23 For a detailed discussion of this particular argument see my “Justice and Justification in the War on Terror,” *Paper presented in the VII Congress of the Americas*, Nov. 8-11, 2006, Puebla, México.
On this account it matters little which particular moral values are invoked in the war on terror, as in other wars, or how plausible the arguments used to uphold them are. It also matters little whether justifications based on “rational” assessment of an imminent threat, such as the existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in a certain territory, turn out to be erroneous or even fabricated. Each group would still fight to protect “their” way of life regardless, merely on the basis that it is “theirs.” If Schmitt is right, then the war on terror and the new world (dis)order has less to do with the confrontation of radically incompatible worldviews (a confrontation belonging to Schmitt’s sphere of morality, not the political), than with an urgent need to sharpen the distinctions between collective identities—distinctions that have been blurred or diluted by the forces of globalization/glocalization and the collapse of the bipolar international order.

Schmitt’s emphasis on the centrality of preserving one’s collective identity in the face of such strong identity-disturbing forces is perhaps even more clearly exemplified today than in 1932. It could certainly be used as a lens through which to explain any number of other conflicts: the ongoing warfare between Israel and Palestine, the tensions and periodic fighting between Russia and its former Soviet satellite states, and the savage Sunni-Shiite conflict that was unleashed in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion.

The emphasis on the exclusive nature of identity construction leads to the conclusion that an inter-national (or other plurality of identities) context is required to provide the contrast necessary for the clear definition of a collective identity. But this theory does not stipulate that just any form of “other” is needed—neutral toleration of others, or half-hearted partnerships to foster security or prosperity fail on this model to provide the required clear definition. At some point, the intensification to the friend-enemy status on at least one front is, for Schmitt, required. But it is also inevitable. On this model, if one enemy disappears (as a direct result of enemy actions or for other systemic reasons) a vacuum is created that at some point needs to be filled.
An obvious illustration of this concerns the transition to a unipolar international order after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The effects of losing such a starkly defined “enemy” placed the collective identity and global role of the United States in serious question, both internally and externally. This blurring of a solid sense of national identity was reflected in U.S. foreign policy during the 1990s and thereafter, which has lacked a clearly defined geopolitical strategy. This was reflected in the continuous wavering over whether and how to intervene in some admittedly daunting international crises. Joint peace operations in Bosnia and Kosovo in the face of ethnic cleansing and atrocious human rights abuses did succeed, though they were entered into in a way that Schmitt would not have seen as wholehearted expressions of either “friendship” or enmity. However, U.S. stances toward Rwanda and Somalia were abysmal failures.

One interpretation of these occurrences, from a Schmittian perspective, is that ‘another other’ subsequently had to be found (or invented) to balance the inescapable tension that loss of U.S. national identity has entailed. One interpretation is that the reaction to the attacks of September 11, 2001, reflected this. And though while a concrete enemy clearly existed, much effort was made to embellish an account of its “evil” origins and purpose. As Kelanic observes, “[t]he seemingly infinite and recurring supply of existential enemies suggests that the real action stems less from the presence of any finite, essentialist differences between peoples, leading to the recognition of “Other” as “enemy,” and more from the inclination of peoples to reinvent each other as existential enemies.” G.W. Bush’s comment in 2006 illustrates the wider implications

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26 Kelanic, “Carl Schmitt,” 17-18. While this does not contradict widely shared perception that anarchy is endemic it certainly undermines the grounds that both liberals and realists deploy to expect international cooperation.
of Kelenic’s point here: "[y]ou know, one of the hardest parts of my job is to connect Iraq to the war on terror."^27

What sets the friend-enemy distinction apart in its contemporary usefulness is that it captures the motivations surrounding the formation of group identities at the sub- or supra-state level. Schmitt mentions labour unions or social class in this context,^28 but it is not difficult to see how the formation of other sub- or trans-national identities based on distinctions of race, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, or religion fit without much adjustment into this model. While these identities are based on associations that may be motivated by shared economic, moral or religious interests, if the internal antithesis of these spheres intensifies enough that it raises the prospect of violence—even if that prospect is subsequently rejected—the friend-enemy criterion is engaged and the community becomes a “political entity.” If that entity is prepared to take a decision that violent repulsion of an enemy is necessary, then it wields political power. The implication for practice here is that Schmitt’s theory of how group identity is constructed can be applied to more than just foreign policy. It opens the way for admitting non-state actors into the friend-enemy criterion of the international political realm as exercisers of “real political power.”

Since the resources possessed by the state in Schmitt’s time far outclassed the resources of internal communities, he believed that friend-enemy groupings formed on membership of a sovereign state would always be the strongest political entities capable of the most decisive use of political power. Competition between rival associations for the loyalty of the citizen dilutes the sense of belonging, and works to obscure rather than define a clear group identity. The allegiance an individual can demonstrate to any group is also diluted because which association commands one’s obedience is unclear. Yet when a state is exposed as unable to provide security to its


28 Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, 37.
citizens, then Schmitt predicted that the rise of other, non-state centres of political identity and allegiance are likely, along with the rise of potential conflict between them. “If within the state there are organized parties capable of according their members more protection than the state, then the latter becomes at best an annex of such parties, and the individual citizen knows whom he has to obey.”

This part of Schmitt’s argument anticipates that strain of IR theory that has vigorously debated the relationship between threats and national security in the post-9/11 period. Here I point in broad terms to a few other potential applications of Schmitt’s arguments which merit future examination.

First, his work provides an interesting new perspective on the debate about the decline/transformation of the nation state and/or state sovereignty in the globalised world.

Second, Schmitt’s theoretical framework may provide a partial explanation for the impact of contemporary religious fundamentalism in the international arena. This is the darker side of Schmitt’s thinking, which contains a strong set of arguments against pluralism; almost in a devil’s advocate fashion, scholars of religious fundamentalism would do well to take this into account.

Finally, Schmitt does provide a fresh take on the primary tensions between particularistic claims

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29 Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 52.

30 The body of literature on this is enormous, but a good overview from the perspective of International Relations is Per A. Hammarlund, *Liberal Internationalism and the Decline of the State: The Thought of Richard Cobden, David Mitrany, and Kenichi Ohmae* (Palgrave MacMillan History of International Thought, 2005).

31 Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 40-3.
inherent in “identity politics” and the universalisation of key norms in central global institutions and practices such as human security and human rights.

II: The Friend-Enemy Distinction: Potential Applications in International Relations

Because this paper aims to highlight the breadth of Schmitt’s appeal to the discipline, the following illustrations of the different ways his work can be useful should be seen as brief indicators that leave plenty of room for future development and analytic testing. The areas below are samples of Schmitt’s potential to 1) enrich existing IR theories; 2) ground existing claims about how identities are formed in practice; and 3) provide much-needed conceptual tools to understand recent developments in the concept of war and its relation to terrorism.

Engaging International Relations Theory

Schmitt’s ‘Political Identity Realism’

Schmitt’s thought generated not a normative vision but an attempt to capture something elemental about international empirical reality. And although he placed the need to belong to a clearly defined group and not a need for physical security at the center of what motivates human action, there are clearly multiple points of intersection between his theory and realism that could be used to revise this approach.


33 See e.g., Darren C. Zook, Decolonizing Law: Identity Politics, Human Rights, and the United Nations, Harvard Human Rights Journal vol. 19 (Spring 2006): 95-122. Schmitt’s insistence that group identity requires an “other” led him to reject liberal universalism and argue strongly against the idea of “humanity” used as a category to justify any international behavior. It is precisely this rejection that tends to make his work appear extremely controversial to those influenced by mainstream theoretical approaches.

34 Schmitt and Morgenthau exchanged criticisms on several occasions and, according to Schwab, Schmitt’s work influenced Morgenthau’s theory in a number of areas. Schwab, “Introduction,” Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, 26.
Given the similarities between Schmitt’s work and Hobbes, it is not surprising that his writings have already been employed in updating the realist IR model. Rosemary Kelanic is largely successful in her recent attempt to show that Schmitt augments realist thought by adding to it a plausible account of political identity that does not merely assume the existence of international anarchy, but shows it to be a result of the friend-enemy grouping.\(^\text{35}\)

Kelanic’s understanding, quoted earlier, of the friend-enemy distinction as a process where reinvention of enemies is ongoing reduces the prospects for international cooperation well beyond the point realists are prepared to accept. While liberals posit that cooperation should expand with trade promotion\(^\text{36}\) and the reduction of “transaction costs” between trading nations due to the role of international institutions,\(^\text{37}\) realists instead emphasize the limits to cooperation. For realists, security trumps good business. Nevertheless, from the Schmittian perspective, preserving the integrity of one’s collective identity imposes an even tighter restriction on the prospect of good business than the realist concern for security.

For instance, Grieco\(^\text{38}\) holds that cooperation is more sustainable between asymmetric partners than between fairly symmetrical ones. The grounds for such a proviso are that, in an asymmetric power relationship, the benefits derived from cooperation by the weaker partner are unlikely to strengthen him to the point of enabling him to pose a threat to the security of the stronger one. By contrast, cooperation between fairly symmetric partners can very easily turn the

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35 Kelanic terms this position “political identity realism,” a term I have borrowed in this section.

36 Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” in H.S. Reiss (Ed.) Kant Political Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 93-130.


tables between them. The upshot of Grieco’s position is that the limits to cooperation are set by the differences in power of the potential partners. If the differences are small, the most powerful partner is likely to call off the cooperative scheme. Schmitt, however, would accord scant importance to the power of the parties to a cooperative scheme, even a cooperative arrangement between asymmetric partners would break down if the integrity of the collective identity of the weakest partner were at stake. For Schmitt nothing is likely to deter an identity collective from doing everything it can to ensure its existential survival.

**Turning Constructivism on its Head**

Schmitt’s account of identity can also help us to pinpoint problems in other theoretical paradigms. On the surface, there seem to be strong parallels between Schmitt’s theory of international relations and constructivism. Both outlooks claim that behavior on the international stage often defies the rational calculations and self-interest of the realist account because human motives are based more fundamentally on issues of identity, than they are on Zweckrationalität. Collective identity has its own imperative that does not require either rational or moral justifications, though both may be subsequently invoked to explain an action. But the account of identity in both models diverges in a crucial way. Kelanic’s strongest argument is that Schmitt’s view of identity based on exclusion highlights the flaws in Alexander Wendt’s inclusive constructivist version of identity. For Wendt,

identity requires inclusive social recognition. Eventually, mutual affirmation between self and Other develops into friendship (friend/friend) and finally overarching collective identity (a single “friend” that encompasses “us.”) This progression towards higher levels of collective identity leads Wendt to conclude that “friend” will someday expand to include all humanity – resulting in a world state.\(^{39}\)

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Schmitt’s emphasis on the primary role that exclusion plays in collective identity construction contests this characterization on a number of levels, the most central of which is that “[c]ollectives achieve self-identity by denying affirmation to the Other through the labeling of it as ‘enemy.’”40 Extending Kelanic’s point a bit further, Schmitt’s view is that identities are constructed and malleable, not essential and fixed. But they are constructed politically through conflict and exclusion, rather than socially through mutuality and inclusion. This criticism can be extended to the work of other key constructivists because of their reliance on the mutual identification argument. Decades before the contemporary constructivist perspective hit the international arena, Schmitt had formulated its precise opposite. And, as the following section demonstrates, this can lead to quite different interpretations and predictions of current problems such as that of how “deep” North American integration is likely to fare.

**Grounding Existing Identity Claims: A North American Regional Identity?**

One recognizable contribution Schmitt can offer to IR scholars is a coherent set of theoretical claims that can underwrite, explain and further substantiate those made in more practical studies. Numerous examples come to mind here, but perhaps the most appropriate for this brief sketch concerns how Schmitt’s work enables us to arrive at a convincing explanation, beyond the prevailing views, as to why North American integration has resisted the “deepening” that theories of political economy led us to expect at the time of the launching of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) back in 1994.41

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One could be forgiven for initially classing matters of regional integration as a kind of ‘friend’ grouping in the Schmittian model, on a parallel with: the realist principle of forming alliances on the basis of shared interests/enemies; the liberal idea of rational cooperation; or the constructivist recognition of shared interests leading to mutual values/identification. However, in North America it seems that the exclusion-based account of identity Schmitt offers has some part to play in unraveling the complicated relations between Canada, Mexico and the U.S.

At first glance, a Schmittian view opens a window on why national identity has so persistently trumped any authentic sense of regional identity in the fifteen years since NAFTA’s inception. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the U.S. decision to construct a 1,500 mile concrete wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, a decided case of overkill in distinguishing the “other.” But the Canadian response is similarly telling. Views of Canadian identity are exemplified by what Brian Bow calls the “‘not-America’ reflex” which, in certain respects, is reflected in Mexican identity as well. The forces Schmitt described are clearly at play in statements like: “one of the most distinctive features of the Canadian nation-building project is the way that it has tended to define itself in terms of separation from, and opposition to, the United States.” Bow’s preliminary study is not yet grounded on an explicit theoretical framework, but Schmitt’s could well be a strong candidate. The review given earlier certainly provides a set of rather coherent explanations for the claims in the following passage (as well as identifying a key inconsistency).


Other societies tend to define themselves mostly in terms of common ethnicity, language, religion, and/or historical experience. Canadian national identity is studded with each of these elements, but none of them is solid enough to hold the country together, so they have historically been bolstered—and sometimes even displaced—by a focus on the ways Canada is separate and different from the United States. This seems to happen all the time in small countries living in the shadow of bigger, very similar “cousins” (e.g., Austria vis-à-vis Germany, New Zealand vis-à-vis Australia). But, in the Canadian experience, it has been powerfully reinforced by the political legacies of the Empire Loyalists, and the carefully-cultivated “mythology of rejectionism.”

Bow continues that state attempts to construct Canadian national identity have, in practice,

been propped up by invidious comparisons with the US. What made Canadian society distinctive, and distinctively virtuous, it was argued—or at least implied—was that it was not as torn by “mob rule,” not as over-run by rampant capitalism, and not as corrupt and scandal-plagued as the United States.

Clearly there is some level of tension in Canada’s not-America reflex, but these sentiments have ostensibly stayed within the bounds of the ‘friend’ side of the equation… or have they? Worries about the Canada-U.S. relationship suggest that it might be more subject to a pseudo-Schmittian intensification of the already “invidious comparisons” than some would like to think. One scholar, for example, argues that “[i]n a world that has been widely viewed as undergoing homogenization toward American economic, political, and cultural standards, Canada sees nothing new per se, only an expansion in the scale and form of the American ‘threat’ to Canadian identity at home and abroad that the state is on guard to counter.”

Bow’s points are interesting in that the relation of negativity found in Canada, Austria and New Zealand toward their larger ‘cousins’ is thought to be somehow an exception to the rule—where the rule shows all the signs of making constructivist assumptions concerning identity as inclusive and stimulated ‘from the inside out.’ On this latter model, national identity is assumed

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48 Underwritten by the theories of Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm.
to be created through shared norms, values and experiences of a particular group with a shared history, or a shared perception of one. The further assumption is that the more those norms and values can be spread outside the nation (or state), the more likely larger identity groupings could possibly be forged—one day managing to create uncontested, integrated regional or even global groupings based on shared norms, values and experiences of the kind found in liberal universalist and cosmopolitan theories.

This, it has to be said, is not the kind of argument that is borne out empirically in the North American case. Since the run-up to NAFTA, the hope has been that integration would somehow be a process of learning how to forge a collective identity through an increasing awareness of, and focus on, the shared values and circumstances of the partner states. In practice, this premise has proved to be hopelessly naïve. We are witnessing something far closer to the Schmittian model of identity-through-exclusion, even if this process has unfolded in a rather ambivalent manner. Schmitt would argue that it is the failure to fully recognize and take advantage of the identity distinctions (coupled with clinging to a liberal mode of economic cooperation that has shown itself incapable of intensifying the relation between rival “economic competitors” into closely aligned “regional political friends”) that explains at least partially the inability of the U. S. to assume the ‘decisive’ (hegemonic) leadership role that is still appropriate to its size and international status in the 21st century. Schmitt would also tell us that U.S. reticence in the new millennium is a product of its own increasingly muddled national identity.

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49 Which, in its characteristic avoidance of contestation and conflict, blurs the boundaries of collective identities rather than clarifies or sharpens them.
On most accounts, the three North American partners are more concerned with those values and interests that are NOT shared and as a result “deeper integration,” at least in the form of regional identity development, remains elusive. Although the very desirability of such a process is still hotly contested on a number of grounds, few—if any—have brought a Schmittian perspective to that particular debating table. Of the rich literature that has been generated on the subject of North American integration, only a few fringe opponents would rule out the future integration scenario as a successful one. A Schmittian perspective would not necessarily rule out success either, but it would predict that deeper integration is unlikely. In any case, Schmitt gives one answer to Bow’s query as to why there is so little support for, and even less movement toward, a mutual regional identity—although there is much room to explore just how far down Schmitt’s answer may hold.

**New Conceptual Tools for Understanding War and Terrorism**

The final and most obvious arena where Schmitt’s ideas speak concretely to current theoretical and other debates in IR is on the subject of war. Again, his explanation of the deep causes of war stems from the connection between group identity and conflict and notions of “the political.” Yet, as we have seen, this cause often lies hidden behind successive justifications based on the tensions that characterize other spheres of human life (good/evil in the moral sphere, 

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profitable/unprofitable in economics, sacred/profane in religion). For Schmitt, focusing on these justifications merely obfuscates the “real” motives of combatants and defers the achievement of their objective: addressing threats to group identity (threats that may well be systemic rather than attributable directly to “the enemy”) by sharply defining the other through which to define the collective self. As traditional realist explanations for war built on balance-of-power and hegemonic stability theories have been eclipsed by real world events in the post-9/11 era, the value-added of Schmitt’s theory lies in the light it sheds on the changing nature of war and terror(ism) and the impact this has had on how violence is legitimated.

As the descriptive and prescriptive tools for assessing threat and waging war have been rendered increasingly inadequate by the modern transformation of war, Schmitt’s work is also worth revisiting on this count. He was aware that his 1932 characterization of “the enemy” lacked nuance and so, in 1963 he rectified this in an essay—translated into English in 2004—that sets out a detailed typology of the concept of the “enemy.” I would argue that the prescience of this typology could allow for the development of clear and objective guidelines for evaluating what the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate has called today’s “heightened threat environment.” In particular, Schmitt’s work cautions against wild overgeneralizations which, in the contemporary setting have been directed across different ethnic or religious groups—the vast majority of which have no responsibility for, or inclination to become, the enemy (or, for that matter, a friend).

53 By far the most cogent account of the historical transformation of war and its impact on counterterror policy I have found is given by Neta C. Crawford in “Just War Theory and the U.S. Counterterror War,” Perspectives in Politics vol. 1, no. 1 (Sept 2003): 1-25.


In *Theory of the Partisan*, where “partisan” is understood as an irregular fighter who takes up arms for a certain political idea (now termed freedom fighter, guerilla, insurgent, terrorist), Schmitt distinguishes between the ‘conventional enemy,’ the ‘real enemy’ and the ‘absolute enemy’ on the basis of the limitations each enemy accepts on their actions. The conventional enemy involves states “who respect each other at war as enemies and do not treat one another as criminals, so that a peace treaty becomes possible and even remains the normal, mutually accepted end of war.”

Real enemies correspond to traditional partisans working from within a state who either seek to overthrow an oppressor or resist an invader. While not limited by conventional rules of engagement, real enemies are restricted by the defensive quality of their mission, which is “to defend a concrete notion of right linked to homeland or territory against an invader who claims a universal moral or legal legitimacy.” Schmitt had in mind here the Spanish Guerilla War against Napoleonic France (1808-14) and the acts of the French Resistance in occupied France. The real enemy is also limited because she does not act on the basis of an enmity to “all mankind.” That is reserved for the absolute enemy, the global revolutionary whose actions are unconfined by territorial or time limits, are based on abstract notions of justice and which serve to denounce their enemy as a criminal, or even inhuman. Exemplified for Schmitt by the absolute enmity between class enemies in Lenin’s theories, this category describes those who see themselves obliged/forced to annihilate their victims and objects, even morally. They have to consider the other side as entirely criminal and inhuman… Otherwise they are themselves criminal and inhuman. The logic of value and its obverse, worthlessness, unfolds its annihilating consequence, compelling ever new, ever deeper discriminations, criminalizations, and devaluations to the point of annihilating all of unworthy life. In a world in which the partners push each other in this way into the abyss of total devaluation before they annihilate one another physically, new kinds of absolute enmity must come into being.

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The contemporary significance of this category needs no belaboring, except to stress that the absolute enmity extends beyond the partisan to both sides of the war on terror. For Barder, the connection goes even further: “more often than not, the usage of the word terrorism is often as such a way to generate the absolute enmity. An absolute enemy for which there can be no discussion, no compromise and no rationalization or questioning.”59 Given this characterization, it is easy to see that “[w]here security is judged as being tied not to geopolitical criteria but to the total eradication of “tyranny,” “rogue” states, or terrorism, then any means is considered legitimate in such a pursuit.”60 Dick Cheney’s “dark side” remarks after 9/11 illustrate that this point was certainly grasped by the Bush administration: “a lot of what needs to be done here will have to be done quietly, without any discussion, using sources and methods that are available… it's going to be vital for us to use any means at our disposal, basically, to achieve our objective.”61

Reconceptualizing traditional state war and acts of terror forces a questioning of how we legitimate one while de-legitimating the other, since the old context and framework we used to do so no longer functions. Schmitt’s work certainly forces us to question the “assumption of a prima facie illegitimacy of contemporary acts of terror”62 as well as a similar prima facie legitimacy of the state-driven counterterror war. It also provides a way of interpreting the shifting constellations of the friend-enemy distinction that adds to the realist explanation of self-interest captured in the principle of “my enemy’s enemy is my friend.” This principle might still hold, but Schmitt adds


that “[y]esterday’s brother [could show] himself to be the more dangerous enemy”\textsuperscript{63} today. The political legitimacy attributed to the *Mujahideen*\textsuperscript{64} insurgents encouraged to fight in Afghanistan in the late-1970s and 80s was certainly based on a “political” alignment in the Schmittian sense against the Soviet Union and Afghan government. Any such legitimacy has been totally stripped from persons travelling as *Mujahideen* to Afghanistan, Iraq or the U.S. 25 years later. They are, as Kochi points out, “treated as the enemy, if not the absolute enemy and are criminalized, condemned as ‘terrorists’ and locked up indefinitely in prison cells.”\textsuperscript{65}

In dealing with the problems caused by contemporary forms of warfare and the idea of the enemy within, the taxonomy of the enemy Schmitt offers has further implications in several areas worthy of future academic attention. It has already been pointed out that the “evolving consideration of enmity” prompted by Schmitt’s discussion needs to be taken into account both in future intervention strategies and in the design and maintenance of peacekeeping operations.\textsuperscript{66} The latter point is worth stressing, given that so many recent peace operations have been unsuccessful in achieving even their basic aims.\textsuperscript{67} But perhaps even more important than this, the room he makes for identifying the “enemy within” challenges the continued entrenchment of the prevailing Weberian definition of the state as an entity that successfully claims the monopoly of

\textsuperscript{63}\textsuperscript{63} Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*, 61.

\textsuperscript{64}\textsuperscript{64} Interestingly, given the Schmittian focus here, the etymology of this term here means “one who struggles.”

\textsuperscript{65}\textsuperscript{65} Kochi, “The Partisan,” 286. The point is an interesting one. See my “Violence and Deprivation: Arendt and the Pervasiveness fo Superfluous life,” \textit{Paper presented at the MPSA Conference}, Chicago, April 4, 2009 in which I explore how perception of the so-called suspected terrorists incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Graib can be related to the Arendtian notion of human superfluousness and its dire implications not just for ethics and international relations, but also for what it shows about the changing nature of the state.


\textsuperscript{67}\textsuperscript{67} For an exploration of some of the most telling examples, see my “Peacekeeping,” in Amalendu Misra (ed.), \textit{Conflict Resolution}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2009).
the legitimate use of violence within a given territory. It is in this challenge that Schmitt engages the most elemental question of how to reconfigure our understanding of the state and sovereignty in the current international order.

Limitations of the Schmittian account

There are, of course, many limitations to Schmitt’s perspectives, but perhaps the most worrying is his separation of ethical concerns from the friend-enemy distinction of the political. This strategy does not merely mean that his theory of international relations can be criticized for failing to include an appropriate normative vision. It categorically precludes that one can be attached without undermining a significant pivot. This, it has to be said, is damaging. Schmitt’s position that questions of collective identity have their own imperative and operate beneath the level of moral and rational justifications might be plausible, and empirically supported in a number of circumstances. And it is clear that his close consideration of just what “the enemy” can mean in different contexts is as valuable in the scope of its application as it is starkly pragmatic. But if his connection between identity and potential conflict is as valid as it appears, this leaves open a great many normative questions that cannot be quite so readily bracketed outside contemporary International Relations or International Political Theory as Schmitt argued. In other words, his methodology of insisting on “clear legal and conceptual distinctions between different actors in armed conflict” may be necessary, but is not sufficient. While it is plain that the discipline must take “the political” as its central realm of analysis, it also needs to account for, and even involve itself in, the moral realm too. And for guidance in that enterprise we must turn to other theorists.

Conclusion

68 Barder, “Carl Schmitt and Humanitarian Intervention,” abstract.
This paper has attempted to show that Schmitt’s famous friend-enemy distinction is an extremely versatile resource for IR theorists as well as for those concerned with identity politics, nationalism and how to understand, classify and analyze the changing faces of terrorism and war. By placing the need to belong to a clearly defined group and not a need for physical security at the centre of what motivates human action, Schmitt not only provides “a stark account of the deep causes of war,” as Kelanic argues. He also manages to uncover motivations for international behavior that push even deeper than the realist focus on self interest. And by linking that clear definition of identity to the possibility of enmity and conflict, Schmitt all but turns social constructivist accounts of identity, mutuality and international cooperation on their heads. These elements combine to create a theory of international relations that challenges us to review—if not rethink—several facets of central IR theories today. And that reviewing and rethinking, I hope to have shown, could well lead us to different conclusions about several contemporary issues of identity and conflict than the ones we are used to drawing.

I have elsewhere developed and defended a methodology based on theoretical perspectivism, and it is viewing Schmitt’s theory as one of a variety of useful perspectives that can help us to see how his ideas can enrich existing approaches in International Relations. Like all theories, some of the components of his thought need adjustment, others need sensitive (and repeated) reading. Still others require caution and a few may well justify wholesale rejection. Or his theory may be viewed by many as more useful for what it gets wrong, than what it gets right—in which case, so be it; there are just as many valuable lessons to be learned from Schmitt’s mistakes. But whatever one thinks of Schmitt’s rather provocative “take” on the international order, it is unusual to find a scholar of IR or politics who remains neutral with respect to Schmitt’s offerings, or unreflective on what they say about one’s own area and staple arguments.

69 Norman, El yo político, passim.
He is one of those thinkers who we either love or hate, but given the nature of his theory this is, perhaps, not entirely surprising. Yet whether he is an author we side with or against, if he makes us uncomfortable enough to reflect on and rethink old connections and assumptions, to update our theories or search for more accurate ones, he is clearly doing his job!