The Constructed Enemy

- The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict as an Example

Yifu Zhao[1,a,*]

[1]*School of International Studies, Hainan University, Hainan, China*
a. guanjingchang@ldy.edu.rs
*corresponding author

Abstract: With the continuous development of international relations theory, it has been increasingly recognized that neither traditional rationalism nor reflexivism is sufficient to fully explain many phenomena in the present world. With the criticism of realism and the development of postmodernism, constructivism has been embraced by many researchers as a new research paradigm. The realist approach to research explains international society by explaining the meaning as well as the origin of things in the objective world. Carl Schmitt's ideas are ostensibly more focused on material forces and should be more closely aligned with realism. But in reality, he used ideas to define the emergence of political affairs. Thus, at its core, Carl Schmitt is inherently similar to constructivism. However, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been intensifying in recent years. Therefore, using the above theory to explain the reasons for the emergence and escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has important theoretical and practical significance. This not only means combining the theories of traditional thinkers with new research paradigms, but also helps people to understand the nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and find better ways to promote peace and development in the Middle East.

Keywords: Constructivism, Carl Schmitt, Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

1. Introduction

Constructivism has been criticized mainly because there are many different views within it. Constructivism, represented by Wendt, is namely opposed by rationalism and criticized by reflectivism. But its kernel has a natural affinity with Carl Schmitt's theory. Skillfully combining the two schools of theory can help us analyze international relations in reality. And as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to intensify, the study of its causes has become more important. Therefore, this paper combines constructivism with Schmidt's theory, which is used to analyze the causes of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The methodology adheres to the interpretation of perceptions emphasized by constructivism and analyzes how the perceptions behind the Palestinian-Israeli conflict affect the continued escalation of the conflict from Schmitt's division of enemies and friends.

2.   Enemies and Friends in the Construct

The division between enemy and friend is actually already a result, yet the relationship is constructed. The real reason needs to be found by going back to more primitive ideas

2.1.   From Realism to Constructivism Represented by Wendt

After the end of the Cold War, the competing trends of realism and neoliberalism gradually receded. However, with the continuous development of postmodernism and the study of the philosophy of language, a research paradigm that attempts to unify rationalism and reflectivism, namely, constructivism, has been spawned. Although constructivism is still controversial today, constructivism as a new paradigm did change the way of thinking in the field of international politics.

The importance of realism in the field of international relations research cannot be ignored, and it has made outstanding contributions in terms of theory and research methods. But it is equally important for critics to argue that realists have focused too much on the role of matter and neglected the role of ideas [1]. In fact considerations concerning both material and conceptual are necessary in the field of international relations research. Constructivism, as represented by Wendt, is largely opposed to traditional rationalism, i.e., the a priori assumption of the identities and interests of political participants. It recognizes the importance of materiality while paying more attention to its sources [2]. Wendt argues that interests are not necessarily the same for individual participants in international society. Even if there is a similar identification with a certain interest, its source is completely different. Factors such as geography, religion, culture, and ideology cannot be ignored in this process. And international actors and the structures in which they operate are also mutually constructive. This is grounded in a change in the basic philosophical understanding that abandons the debate between materialism and idealism. There is no longer an excessive discussion about the first line of matter and the first nature of spirit, but a greater focus on the interaction between the two. In short, Wendt's constructivism recognizes the importance of objective facts on the one hand, but on the other hand advocates that the influence of ideas on objective facts should not be ignored and is therefore a research paradigm that combines a number of strengths [3].

2.2.   Carl Schmitt on the Division of Enemy and Friend

Carl Schmitt has been a controversial theorist, with some arguing that his experience working for the Nazis heavily influenced his political thought; others see his thought as a variant of political theology and still in danger of becoming a form of political nihilism [4]. But his emphasis on the importance of the political sphere and the division between enemy and self-remain very important.

First of all, he defines the real meaning of politics by depicting its boundaries. Because of the influence of traditional theories such as natural law and law, the domains of morality, law and politics are confused. Schmitt gives a theory of sovereignty which is different from the traditional theories. He first defines the sovereign as the person who can decide on the emergency outside of the law and implement the decision. In this process when all moral codes are disobeyed and the legal system is paralyzed, a strong political power still exists and is able to function. The source of legitimacy of this power is a certain metaphysical notion within the nation-state, so that politics is by no means an adjunct to law or morality, but rather a domain distinct from them.

On this basis, Schmitt suggests that the essence of politics lies in distinguishing between friend and enemy. This means that there is a risk of confrontation in politics. The highest expression of this risk of confrontation is war, and the essence of war is the denial of the enemy's survival, the relationship between the two being annihilation and annihilation. The basis on which politics can function within a community is the common will of the public to fight the enemy in order to survive. This is the essence of politics. At the same time Schmitt argues that the very nature of weapons is a

tool for the annihilation of human beings, a tool that makes war capable of devastating consequences, and therefore politics is very dangerous. And the participants in politics, human beings, are also very dangerous. Therefore, Schmitt believes that people are evil because they will never be truly peaceful or eternally subject to law and morality. Furthermore, things in the political sphere are not subject to moral and legal standards. Therefore, a strict distinction needs to be made between things in different spheres. But conflicts in other spheres can become political as they increase in intensity. Religion, for example, may lead to war, and by the time war breaks out religious affairs have become part of political affairs. For in Schmidt's view, war is the highest form of political conflict.

2.3. The Combination of Constructivism and Schmidt's Theory

On the surface, Schmidt's ideas are closer to realism, but in fact their kernel is closer to constructivism. First, Schmidt believes that other forms of conflict will be transformed into political conflict as the degree increases. The process of transformation also involves the transformation of the identity of the participants. In fact, the identities of the participants are not a priori, but change during their interaction with each other. This change does not only come from the self-identification of one participant but is the result of the joint shaping of all the participants and the structure itself. Schmidt is keen to point out that political issues are the most important ones. For the highest form of political conflict is war, and the weapons used in war offer the possibility of total annihilation of the enemy. When the conflicts between the participants are sharp enough and the constructed identity of the enemy is clear enough, the likelihood of a serious politically based conflict or even war is greatly increased.

Thus, combining constructivism with Schmidt's theory provides us with a new way of thinking about the study of international conflicts. With the increasing complexity of international relations, both ideological and cultural differences have shaped different international political players and the structure of international relations. The causes of direct conflict or the outbreak of war are to a large extent rooted in the distinction between the identity of the enemy and the self. However, such distinctions are largely a consequence, and the more important question is how they come about. Constructivism offers us a way to analyze its causes. It is only by analyzing how structures and actors construct each other that we can find out why conflict occurs.

3. Case Study

The fact is that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a long-standing problem, with five large-scale conflicts having occurred since 2007. The reasons for the outbreak of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are complex. Religion and history play a huge role, and even the Israelis often cite biblical references to legitimize their rule over the disputed region. And on top of that, the region itself is very special [5]. First, most of the other countries living in the region follow Islam, while the Israelis follow Judaism. According to the fundamentalist interpretation, both religions are characterized by exclusivity. And because of the circumstances of the region and the varying degrees of influence of other countries, a unique kind of anarchy has developed in the region [6]. The lack of strong systems and institutions makes it easier to further exacerbate the conflict. The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, however, did not stem only from the groups they formed, but was the result of their co-construction with the particular structures of the region.

3.1. Religious and Historical Influences on Today's Conflict

The Bible once referred to Israel as a land flowing with milk and honey. But this place is often accompanied by a great deal of war and conflict. One of the most important sources of legitimacy for the Israelis' claim to rule the region stems from the Bible, namely that it is the land of God's promise

to the Israelites. It was therefore legitimate to establish a state and rule on what they saw as sacred land. Instead, there have been many religious wars throughout history, the mid-medieval Crusades being the most obvious example. Although not a direct conflict between Jews and Muslims in the region, it was a direct confrontation between the Christian and Islamic worlds, with the realization that they viewed each other as infidels and aimed to take over territory and destroy each other [7]. The possibility of the two religions being tolerant of each other is virtually non-existent.

Returning to the present day, there is a growing Zionism among Israelis. Simply put, this idea contains three different elements: ethnicity, religion and security. First, the Jews are convinced of the great superiority of their people over other peoples. This superiority comes from history and from the many descriptions in the Bible. This idea has increased as the Jews have become successful in politics, finance and other fields. The religious rivalry is even more pronounced, as historically Christendom and Islam have viewed each other as enemies. Both Israelis and Palestinians were influenced by the idea of differentiating between the infidels. Finally, there is the all-important issue of security. The neighboring Arab countries had once viewed Israel as a great danger, and there had been many conflicts as a result. Although Israel has always come out on top in past conflicts, this has also increased the insecurity of the Israelis. For the sake of their own security, Israelis have even claimed that there are no Palestinians. This narrative fundamentally denies the existence of an enemy, which is one of the most central parts of Schmidt's theory [8]. Thus, combining the three reasons above, Palestinians and Israelis inevitably gravitate towards war as a solution to their problems.

3.2. The Logic of Anarchy

In the field of international relations studies, it is generally recognized that there are three states of nature. They are the Kantian state of nature, the Lockean state of nature and the Hobbesian state of nature. The first two imply peaceful coexistence or legitimate competition under a certain regime. The Hobbesian state of nature, however, may imply that one group of people is completely opposed to another. The relationship between Palestine and Israel is precisely the third state of nature.

For one thing, there is no authoritative judge in the region, and religion plays a far greater role than international law and conventions in the minds of the locals. Both sides are convinced that some political goals can only be achieved through strong-arm tactics. In reality war is only the highest expression of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the result of amplified hatred, nationalism and insecurity [9]. When the two sides create irreconcilable conflicts that have their roots in history, the division between them as enemies becomes clearer. The meaning of territorial and funding disputes thus changes dramatically. Unlike other mature nation-states, the meaning of territory for Palestine and Israel is very specific. First of all, there is a political claim by the Israelis to establish an independent state in a specific region, with legitimacy derived from religion and history. But the region is equally important to Muslim believers and in recent decades the Middle East has been controlled by many Arab states. Israel's claim to statehood implies a diminution of the influence of other Muslim believers in the land, which can lead directly to a struggle for power [10]. And it is unacceptable to the countries that previously held real power in the Arab region. Religion not only gives legitimacy to the war, but also influences the perception of the importance of power for all people in the region [11]. In conclusion, one of the major causes of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the constructed state of anarchy.

3.3. Co-construction of International Players and Structures

The fact is that the power of the two, Palestine and Israel, as the main players, is in a state of serious imbalance. The goal of Palestinian statehood has not been fundamentally realized [12]. Palestine cannot be called an efficient state, while Israel's level of military and economic development is higher

than that of Palestine. Therefore, there is a serious imbalance in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict [13]. However, the Islamic countries in the neighboring regions supported Palestinian statehood. In the face of this imbalance, Israel has succeeded in gaining the support of the United States and some European countries. The United States and the European countries have a very high demand for crude oil, and therefore they need to maintain friendly relations with other countries in the Arab region. This makes the political situation in the region not entirely determined by Israel and the Palestinians, but by the interaction between them as participants and the international political environment.

It is generally known that with the establishment of the Westphalian system, the requirements of international affairs became clearer and clearer [14]. National interests were in a state of convergence. And with the establishment of international law and international conventions, many formal and informal systems were in fact at work. The Gaza Strip, however, was an exception. First, international law and the international system do not take religion into account. Therefore, it is difficult to judge the religious issues that play an important role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In this case, it is in the best interest of that relations between the states be transformed into a Hobbesian state of nature. Defining the other side as an enemy in terms of methodology fundamentally negates the existence of the other side. The significance of the weapon lies in its ability to annihilate the physical existence of the other, and religion provides legitimacy for this behavior.

4.   Conclusion

Through the above study we were first able to recognize the inherent similarity between constructivism and Carl Schmitt's theory. Constructivism, represented by Wundt, emphasizes the mutual construction of participants and structures. Objective facts in international relations are produced under this interaction, reconciling the contradiction between rationalism and reflexivism. Carl Schmitt's ideas about political affairs and distinguishing between enemies and friends, on the other hand, are useful in simplifying the complexity of the issue and help researchers to understand the connotations of realpolitik. Different schools of theory have different analyses of why the Palestinian-Israeli conflict occurs. But in the case of the combination of constructivism and Schmidt's ideas we can see different results. First, religion and history are very important but are not the only reasons for the emergence of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Rather, their more important role is to provide legitimacy to political claims and wars. When the logic of resolving national disputes becomes religion rather than international law and systems, some barbaric and irrational behavior becomes acceptable. And the actual outcome of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a Hobbesian state of nature that leads directly to the fact that, for both the Palestinians and the Israelis, conflict and war are the only solution to the problem. But this state of nature is not self-generated, it is the result of the interaction between the participants and the international structure. Thus, the two countries, as the main players, do not actually have the power to influence the war in its entirety. Whichever side tries to end the war or negotiate, it faces significant risks and irreparable damage. Therefore, if peace was to prevail in the Gaza Strip, it would require the concerted efforts of all the world's forces.

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