Believing This and Alieving That: Theorizing Affect and Intuitions in International Politics*

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Rationalist models of decision making typically follow the general form of desire + belief = action. But determining an actor’s beliefs and desires often proves challenging. One set of theories turns to psychology—and in particular emotions—to uncover how emotions help to shape and strengthen beliefs. Some of this work establishes a fit between emotions and the rationalist paradigm. It holds that emotions account for more than irrational behaviors; they also serve as a source of rational belief. Feeling, it claims, is believing. I argue that if actors believe in the reasonableness of their feelings, then this move is warranted. But a range of behavior defies this logic. Instead, I suggest that actors often find themselves torn between contradictory affective intuitions, on the one hand, and rational beliefs, on the other. In consequence, they hold rational beliefs, but their resulting behavior qualifies as irrational. I apply existing work on the distinction between belief and alief to make sense of this phenomenon. I illustrate my claims through a rereading of the security dilemma—where irrational intuitions, in conjunction with rational beliefs, fuel conflict.

The Puzzle of Belief-Discordant Behavior
The “dark outskirts of rationality” present a puzzling landscape for international relations (IR) scholars. Here, rationality is compromised but not completely absent. Decision making deviates from expectations derived from rational-choice economic models but also fails to take completely irrational forms. Rational belief and irrational behavior coexist in seeming conflict. Consider the logic of the security dilemma. Scholars observe that policymakers hold a rational belief that increasing security exacerbates the unintentional escalation of hostilities. Yet scholars also argue that fear drives behavior that belies this belief (Rathbun 2007:534–43; Bleiker and Hutchison 2008:116; Tang 2009:593–5). Similarly, scholars continue to debate the roots of the economic sanctions paradox. Policymakers believe that sanctions generally fail to change behavior in target states, yet they continue to employ them (Drezner 1999:10; Whang 2011). Finally, recent debates following the 2008 financial crisis regarding the move to austerity reveal a similar type of belief-behavior mismatch. Policymakers in Europe who held Keynesian beliefs understood that austerity undermined economic recovery. Nevertheless, they adopted austerity measures in dealing with the crisis in Greece and elsewhere (Blyth 2013).2 These cases exemplify belief-discordant behavior: Rational belief is present but it gives way to, arguably, irrational behavior.

In this article, I argue that existing approaches to explaining these types of puzzles suffer from a belief bias. Scholars of international politics implicate beliefs, defined as propositional states that are held to be true, in understanding and explaining individual and state action, which may be either rational or irrational in nature. A variety of new findings suggest, however, that we can only understand much of the action of individuals—and even groups—if we account for non-belief mental states that motivate action. In particular, a new framework in philosophy of mind centered around aliefs—mental states that can be conceptualized as affective intuitions—may prove particularly important to both scholars and the workings of IR. Emotions (for example, fear) and the structural environment (specifically, latent uncertainty) both heavily influence world politics. In short, we currently construe our theoretical explanations, and the empirical tests that follow, with an assumption that purposeful action follows the familiar model desire + belief = action (Fearon and Wendt 2002:59). Yet our desires and beliefs often mandate a particular purposeful behavior X but behavior Y obtains instead. Existing approaches that look for beliefs and desires that lead to that behavior are, in other words, searching in the wrong places. They will never find beliefs and desires that adequately account for relevant action in world politics. Instead, in many cases, we must investigate the intuitions that lead actors to abandon their beliefs and desires. Consequently, as I will suggest, we should amend the current model of action in IR to account for aliefs: We should investigate under what conditions actors

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1 I am grateful to Jennifer Nagel (2012) for this turn of phrase.

2 The claim here is not about whether Keynesianism or austerity are better economic policies, simply that policymakers believed that Keynesianism was the rational approach to the crisis but nevertheless chose austerity instead for reasons to be discussed below.
deviate from beliefs and desires and under what conditions they support and reinforce them.

To illustrate the existing belief bias, consider how IR scholars use emotions to better understand the complex interplay between the affective and cognitive dimensions of decision making. Much of this research focuses on explaining the source of beliefs and how they combine with desire to produce purposeful action. Thus, we tend to focus on how “emotional beliefs,” for example, affect persuasion and the assessment of evidence (Mercer 2010). Many of these works assume that actors really believe that their feelings are reasonable. Emotion constitutes and strengthens beliefs in such a way that it produces otherwise unreasonable degrees of certainty and influences what one desires (Mercer 2010:2). Indeed, “feeling is believing because people use emotion as evidence” (Mercer 2010:1; see also Mercer 2013). Much of the subsequent IR research continues this trajectory: It considers emotions important because they help to constitute beliefs; instead of undermining rationality, emotions actually enhance it.

But what about cases where the actor does not actually believe that the feeling they experience is reasonable but nevertheless acts as if they do? In 2007, the Hualapai Tribe opened a skywalk over the Grand Canyon. The skywalk is a glass structure that is suspended over the canyon, 4,000 feet above the ground. As the New York Times reported, visitors often feel a sense of dread when walking out on to the glass and feel a strong intuition to retreat. As Gendler (2008a:654–5) persuasively argues, this is a case where the individuals experiencing the feeling of dread do not believe that they are unsafe. After all, who would willingly walk out onto a glass structure that they believe to be unsafe? The emotional response here invokes irrational behavior. The emotion of fear undermines, rather than enhances, rationality. Instead of strengthening a belief of insecurity, it creates some other type of belief-like mental state; and if we look for beliefs to explain relevant behavior, we would come up empty. The belief of security and action representing insecurity conflict with one another; emotion serves to create an intuition that we should get off the skywalk as soon as possible. In this case, feeling is definitely not believing.

We should welcome the move to explore emotion. But we still lack the tools to sufficiently theorize the vast realm of affectivity. Nonreflective evaluations and associations affect decision making in diverse situations—from standing on a platform over the Grand Canyon to deciding a course of action when confronted with the security dilemma. Early research on emotions sought to delineate differences between rational and cognitive models of decision making. Emotion in this article is defined as “a subjective experience of some diffuse physiological change” (Mercer 2010:3).3 In doing so, it paralleled work in psychology (Clore and Robinson 2012). Recent studies illustrate the connections and interplay between cognition and broader affective processes; they broaden the unit of analysis to include emergent emotions as a group phenomena to break down artificial boundaries that dominated earlier perspectives.4 I build on this innovative work in emotions. I provide a framework for thinking about how affectivity and cognition come together in specific social and decision-making processes, specifically the development of political intuitions.

This move entails significant theoretical, empirical, and methodological implications. First, as Brent Sasley (2010:692) argues, IR scholars prefer to study “reasoned, rational behavior in the pursuit of ‘good’ political decisions.” The emotions literature largely follows this preference in the way that it illustrates the importance of emotions in making rational decisions. If we want to better understand the logic of rationality, however, then we must understand how rationality works beyond circumstances when it generates “good” decisions. We also need to comprehend circumstances in which actors develop reasoned and well-thought-out beliefs, but disregard them when it comes to their actual behavior. In other words, the dichotomy of rational/irrational and “good decision”/“bad decision” fails to capture the dynamics at work when actors make important decisions.

Indeed, the field needs to synthesize and integrate recent work that advances our understanding of emotions and affect in international politics. This scholarship spans a variety of approaches, from psychology and neuroscience to that of the practice turn. In particular, knowing “when emotions are the guiding framework and when cognitive processes are,” (Sasley 2011:472) presents an ongoing challenge to scholars who seek to understand the causal role of mental states in producing action.5

The alief framework, as I argue below, helps to synthesize, theorize, and structure the vast realm of emotion and affect. From an empirical and methodological perspective, the alief framework implies that existing approaches look in the wrong places and for the wrong types of evidence. If behaviors are not necessarily motivated by beliefs alone, then evidence of beliefs provides only a partial glimpse into the decision-making process. The alief framework suggests that (i) the affective environment and (ii) automatic reactions to particular stimuli in that environment both prove crucial for how actors behave.

In what follows I briefly review the existing literature on emotions and intuitions, taking out divergent approaches to both. I introduce the alief framework, pioneered by the philosopher Tamar Szabó Gendler, which highlights the possibility of, but does not require, contradictory aliefs and beliefs in international politics. I argue that this intuitional perspective provides a new understanding of the security dilemma and assess this understanding empirically with a close reading of debates over navy expenditures in prewar Britain. I also suggest aspects of world politics where an alief-reading provides additional insight into the dynamics of decision making, including economic sanctions, austerity debates, homeland security spending, and potentially overcoming the

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3 Defining emotions is difficult. Social constructionists, such as Durkheim, view emotions as social facts, transcending individual experience and emerging in the context of the collective. I borrow Mercer’s (2010:3) broad definition that includes physiological change at the individual level because I am building on his perspective of emotional beliefs. As I will suggest, this definition does not necessarily preclude emergent perspectives on emotion. For instance, as Fisher and Chon (1989) argue, even social constructionist accounts such as Durkheim’s include diffuse physiological change, since the body is where emotions are experienced.

4 Importantly, although emotion and affect are not the same, they are often used interchangeably in the literature. I conceptualize affect as nonreflective, quick, subconscious evaluations. Emotions are subjective experiences that are physiologically and consciously felt.

5 Importantly, not everyone shares this view. The Krebs and Jackson (2007) critique regarding accessing individual motivations is an important one and will be discussed in the conclusion.
security dilemma through the development of trust. Ultimately IR scholars find the rationality–irrationality characteristic of these thorny puzzles difficult to navigate with existing theoretical perspectives. Finally and crucially, although the focus is on puzzles of belief-discordance, intuitions need not necessarily lead only to irrationality, but rather may strengthen rationality as well.

**Approaches to Emotions in IR and Foreign Policy Analysis**

After decades of either not including, or marginalizing the utility of turning to emotions for explanation (Crawford 2000), researchers now accept the large psychological components of essential IR concepts (Ross 2006). Trust, credibility, risk, assurance, fear, perception, misperception, security, rationality, and interests are either entirely psychological in nature or are affected by emotion. These concepts, as Stein (2012:39) argues, “are not objective properties of the environment but a function of how an ally or adversary feels about and understands reality.” Emotions are central to this understanding because they give personal value to putatively objective realities on the ground. Ultimately this research seeks to better understand what motivates political actors, acknowledging, “[i]t is not possible to understand, explain, or predict human behavior without some knowledge of ‘motivation’—the ‘driving force’ behind behavior” (Madsen 1974:13).

The problem that scholars of international relations face in studying emotion is that emotions are incredibly complex, with psychologists and neuroscientists still working out the details of what they are and how they operate. Although we do know a number of important characteristics of emotions, such as the way “emotions influence beliefs” (Frijda and Mesquita 2000:45), the important links rather than separation between cognition, affect, and emotion (Haidt 2001; Mercer 2005), how they may be held individually or collectively (Sasley 2011; Ross 2014; Mercer 2014), and the important role of automatic processing in the brain that produces preferences and behaviors such as habit (Hopf 2010), debates abound. Marcus (2000:224) concludes that emotion research is “rife with basic disagreements about crucial conceptual definitions.”

Mainly for this reason of process complexity and ontological ambiguity, emotions research in IR focuses on three critical questions central to understanding their role in world politics. First, how should we conceptualize emotions? Second, how should we understand what they do in social and political processes? Finally, how can we overcome the well-known problems of knowing how much of emotion’s influence is based on the agent or structural forces (the agent-structure problem), and how much is emotion material rather than social (the material–ideational problem) in nature? I suggest that the answers to these questions fall along two axes of emphasis, one of which is likely familiar and the other a new form of classification that is borrowed from affective neuroscience models: the latent or emergent nature of emotions, and the extent to which the conceptualization of emotion highlights affective, cognitive, or both types of processing in the body (see Figure 1). As the typology suggests, little work has investigated the role of emotion from a latent and affective perspective, and it is precisely in this quadrant where affective intuitions reside.

Starting at the lower left-hand corner of the typology, many scholars in psychology and IR seek to answer these three crucial questions by emphasizing the latent nature of emotions. That is, emotion serves as a type of intermediary between the environment and behavioral responses to stimuli (Coan 2010:276). In this “latent variable model,” the emotion, such as fear, acts essentially as a variable that precedes and causes variation in other variables, such as autonomic response and intentional behavior. Emotion is latent in the sense that it is always present, though not necessarily visible, waiting to be activated. The latent model is intuitive, dominant in the IR literature (and much of social psychology), and highlights the bodily experience of emotion. Other scholars emphasize the emergent properties of emotion: Emotions are an abstract way of understanding diverse indicators of those responses. In the “emergent variable model,” emotional experiences are composed of many different elements, including subjective understanding of the situation, the sequences of action required to deal with the situation, and socially constructed guidelines for action, all synthesized as an emotion, such as fear. Emergence models of emotion tend to view emotions as “embodied, enacted, and experienced representations of situations” (Clore and Ortony 2013:337).

Latent approaches tend to highlight emotion as an individual-level phenomenon that occurs in the body, such as the experience of an affective intuition, whereas emergent approaches often conceptualize emotion as a collective or group-level experience. Crucially, as psychologists point out, emotions at the individual level can be either latent or emergent and emotions felt as a group can be either as well. For this reason, latent does not reduce to individual and emergent does not reduce to social; although in practical terms, emergent perspectives tend to be the ones that highlight the social or group-oriented nature of emotions, whereas latent perspectives tend to highlight the individual nature of emotions. Emergent models privilege the representation of the situation, which in international political terms is often held collectively. The reason psychologists use the latent/emergent distinction is the fact that emotions in an emergent model may be experienced at the individual level as a latent phenomenon, whereas the emotion may emerge from a group phenomenon and can be experienced in the body as if it was a latent variable being activated. Sasley (2011:458–65) makes a similar point in developing an intergroup emotions theory (IET), which necessarily deals with group emotions emerging and being experienced at the individual level in behavior. The latent/

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6 Space constraints do not allow for a full examination of these examples in the main article. I have therefore placed discussion of economic sanctions, the austerity movement in Europe, homeland security spending, and trust as an alief, online as supplementary materials, entitled “Three Alief Illustrations.”

7 I conceptualize rationality as goal-oriented behavior/thinking designed to make optimal choices under constraint, typically relating means to ends in a type of cost-benefit analysis. Irrationality is conceived as behavior/thinking without inclusion of rationality.

8 There are many ways to map a literature, and mapping exercises are subjective and largely imperfect, but they do demonstrate the diversity of approaches to common problems and follow in the tradition of using maps to highlight the contribution of a literature (see, for example, mapping exercises that highlighted constructivism’s relationship to previous approaches: Adler 1997:331; Wendt 1999:32).

9 Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.
emergent perspective therefore captures some of the intricacies that are difficult to account for through traditional levels-of-analysis distinction.

As ideal types, the latent–emergent distinction is useful in moving beyond an individual–group dichotomy and highlighting the ways different scholars think about what emotions are and how they transcend the levels of analysis problem. The difference between these two broad models goes back to James' (1884) simple example of encountering a bear in the woods. From a latent perspective, the bear activates the "fear variable" that, in turn, activates a sequence of behavioral and psychological responses: heart rate goes up, stress levels increase, blood pressure may increase, escape behaviors may be activated, and so forth. In effect, the emotional experience can be causally and ontologically reduced to its constituent parts. From the emergent model perspective, the individual perceives collectively a number of problems to be solved, including avoidance of the bear, avoidance of behaviors that will scare the bear, preparing the body for particular action, inspiring group action, and so forth. In sum, these problem-solving measures and interpretation of the situation are experienced collectively as fear. Emotion is not causing anything, per se, but instead is caused by, and experienced as, responses of the collective to the situation. Emotion emerges from the situation and thus helps to account for a salient question that Bleiker and Hutchison (2014:498) recently posed: "Can macro models ever account for how specific emotions acquire different meanings and credence in different contexts?" Adopting an explicitly situation-dependent conception of emotions aids in overcoming this traditional limitation in macro or group approaches to emotions.

This is not to argue that the latent model is context or situation independent. If the same bear is encountered in the zoo, then the latent model interprets this as a "low alert" with the result being the fear variable is (usually) not activated. In an emergence model, the context of the situation—being in a zoo, seeing the cages preventing the animals from escaping, and so forth—does not call for any problems to be solved. In addition, the indicators of the emotion may be different in each case. From a latent model perspective, viewing the bear in the woods will likely result in psychophysiological autonomic reactions, such as an increase in heart rate and blood pressure. Although bodily changes likely occur in an emergence model as well, these are also coupled with memories of prior experiences with wildlife, and so on. These models are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather fall on a continuum, defined by degree of emphasis. In practice, scholars often combine elements of both models, suggesting that parts of the emotion are latent and other parts emergent, though it has been traditionally difficult to conceive of how a group could experience something that has been thought to be the realm of the individual body. The distinction between the two approaches is represented graphically in Figures 2 and 3.

One exemplar of the latent approach is Mercer's (2010) argument that emotions, such as trust/distrust, like/dislike, love/hate, influence the types of evidence individuals seek out and retain, and those that they discard, when assessing credibility. Emotions affect the way that material realities, such as capabilities, are received, understood, and acted on. Emotions serve as an "assimilation mechanism" that, when paired with cognitive biases such as the confirmation bias, help to explain why some actors are viewed credibly while others are not. These credibility beliefs are further affected by risk assessment,
that emotions constitute and strengthen beliefs. Emotional beliefs should not be read pejoratively; linking cognition with emotion helps to guard against the claim that emotion-based beliefs are simply irrational. Mercer (2010:25) takes a latent variable approach for a justifiable reason: “[g]etting lost in the psychology of emotion is easy but avoidable.” By sidestepping the emergent aspects of emotions, Mercer distills an important variable that can be used in predictive and testable theory. His emphasis is on highlighting the causal power of emotions, particularly in the creation and strengthening of political beliefs.

Other scholars highlight different causal effects of emotion. Hymans (2006) investigates the links between emotion and national identity to investigate the puzzle of why only some leaders seek nuclear weapons. Here, emotions serve as an important ideological component in decisions over material. Crawford (2014:550) highlights the importance of emotions in affecting material decisions that revolve around interests and positions: “[t]he perception and creation of interests is an emotional process as well as one rooted in a material reality or drive for power.” Kertzer and McGraw (2012) make a similar point on the ideological/material distinction, demonstrating that fear plays a significant role in realist theory writ large, a paradigm traditionally dominated by materialist perspectives, as well as in the minds of ordinary individuals. Their model provides significant benefits as the literature includes emotional variables in a wide swath of areas of IR, from nuclear politics (2012), weapons taboos (Dolan 2013), sincerity assessment (Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012; Holmes 2013), and generalized trust (Rathbun 2011), to funding for homeland security (Mueller and Stewart 2012). Sasley’s (2010:688, 690) application of the affect heuristic by decision makers shows how leaders make necessary simplifications, including the tagging of stimuli with “affective label [s],” (Sasley 2010:690), in making decisions. This provides a clear causal claim on how emotion affects foreign-policy-making, such as the Oslo Accords in 1993, by helping to set priorities for leaders (Sasley 2010:693).

Further up the latent/emergent axis, Ross (2014) theorizes emotions as unique human emergent experiences that constitute a particular mode of human agency. The need for theorization of emotion is not just that emotions are difficult to study because of their ephemeral nature, but also because they are difficult to place in the well-known material/ideational dualism that characterizes much of the field. Transcending this, Ross argues that emotion may affect cognition, as Mercer indicates, but also is part of an open, adaptable system where affective excess, the unreflective but nevertheless important and real shared representation of the situation manifested in general disposition and mood, is a driving force of politics. For Ross (2014), this excess is not the realm of the mystical, but rather the realm of bodily performance that is difficult to pin down analytically as material or ideational, but nevertheless produces important outcomes. This affective experience is an emergent phenomenon that can be felt socially through identity. Emotions are “less tightly connected to willful and recognizable actors” as they are “[e]motional assemblages” (Ross 2014:155). Empirically, Ross demonstrates these dynamics in the U.S. collective experience after 9/11 where emotions did not only “pop into the heads of individual actors” (as a latent perspective might suggest), but rather were transmitted through social processes of emergence (Ross 2014:91). This is tantamount to constructing a theory of emotion that highlights how emotion is more than the sum of its parts, not necessarily predictable by analysis of the parts, with particular emphasis on how emotions emerge through shared human experiences and practices (Bially-Mattern 2011:69).

Similarly, Bleiker and Hutchison (2008) adopt a similar emergence perspective, synthesizing a variety of perspectives to illustrate how visual media, and responses to it, significantly strengthened collective emotional experiences after 9/11 and likely shaped the response in ways that other media forms, such as text alone, could not. Lowenheim and Heimann (2008) show how the emergence of a collective passion of revenge occurs through the experiences of humiliation (see also Saurette 2006) and outrage. The emotion of revenge is a representation of the situation that Israel faced in July 2006, in the lead-up to the Second Lebanon War, after its soldiers were abducted and shots were fired from Lebanon into Israel. Fierke (2013) uses a complex understanding of emotion to investigate an understudied action of IR, self-sacrifice, arguing that emotional dynamics and logics emerge from the image of the suffering body, not necessarily because the image activates an emotional routine but because of the ways individuals and groups interpret the meaning of the suffering self-mutilated body. Bially-Mattern (2011:84) situates emotions in practice theory, resisting reduction of emotions to variables, or constitutive parts, choosing instead to focus on the moment of enactment where the “doer” of a practice is both experiencing the political process as well as experiencing their “existence as a being in the human world.” Instead of thinking about emotions as the internal experience of individuals, Bially-Mattern suggests exploring how emotional practices “structure and organize the various domains of international life” collectively (2011:81). Emotions are understood not as latent variables that cause reactions, but rather emergent experiences that structure social life. The individual unquestionably experiences the emotion in the body, but this beies the full experience of emotion as a social experience.

Building on many of these insights, Sasley (2011:458–9) theorizes how states, as groups, can have emotions. “Intergroup emotions theory” suggests that emotions can

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**Fig. 3. Emergent Variable Model. (Notes. Simplified emergent variable model. In this model variation in the indicators of fear, such as arousal, precedes and causes variation in the fear itself. Adapted from Coan (2010:279)).**
be experienced at the group level but also emerge at the structural level (defined by intergroup interactions that produce emotions). In this framework, emotions may emerge from groups and then affect individuals. But the emotion is certainly more than the sum of all the individuals feeling it; rather, as Sasley (2011:472) argues, “group emotions can also be constitutive in the way they are generated by and then structure group perceptions and intergroup relationships.” This gets to the heart of the emergence model as psychologists conceive of it. By conceptualizing emotion as a potentially collective property that structures group perceptions, Sasley suggests that emotions serve as representation of the situation. In doing so, he reveals the complicated nature of affect, an evaluative disposition that may not necessarily manifest within just one individual but is felt by individuals. Thus, the latent/emergence axis largely distinguishes between individual experience and social/group experiences although emotion can be both experienced in the individual body while becoming instantiated as an emergent collective experience.

IR scholars, paralleling academic work in psychology, also differ in the extent to which they emphasize the cognitive or affective aspects of emotion.\(^\text{10}\) Cognition can be understood broadly as information processing. More difficult to define, affect can be understood broadly as nonreflective evaluation. Mood is often argued to be an affective state that is important in evaluating, or tagging, experiences, for example. Or, as Brennan (2004:1) explains it, “[i]s there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and ‘felt the atmosphere’.” Once again the perspectives form a continuum rather than dichotomy, since cognition can affect affect and vice versa.\(^\text{11}\) Continuing with James’ example, a cognitive focus may investigate how fear on seeing the bear in the woods shapes beliefs and strategies about how to proceed, whereas an affective focus would highlight the instinctual/intuitive evaluation of, and quick reaction to, the situation. Although connected, the distinction is nevertheless helpful in mapping another dimension of what scholars emphasize, as it may suggest reasons for the existence of the belief bias.

Mercer (2010), for example, suggests that the distinctions traditionally drawn between emotion, rationality, and beliefs need be rethought as neuroscience continues to demonstrate the interconnectedness between cognition and emotion (McDermott 2004a). Rationality and emotion are two sides of the same coin, and therefore, it makes little sense to separate the two as disconnected constructs. For Mercer, this means that beliefs have affective constitutive and some beliefs may be formed or strengthened by their emotional content. This analysis seeks to better understand where beliefs and cognitive mental states come from and how they are strengthened. Similarly, Kertzer and McGraw test the microfoundations of realism’s causal mechanism by investigating how emotions affect and shape realist cognitive beliefs. Sasley (2010) also highlights the ways in which affect affects cognition, particularly in the development of beliefs regarding decision-making priorities.

Others point out the ways in which broad, and often subtle, affective reactions affect political behaviors and practices. Fierke (2013) explores responses to the esthetics of self-sacrifice. Affect here is in response to the discourse and representations of self-sacrifice, not only the event itself. Similarly, Ross theorizes the “affective energies” that help to construct dynamic identities that can change based on visual representations and discourse. Ross suggests that it is less useful to think about 9/11 as producing a particular emotion or belief, such as fear. Rather, we should understand the event and its representations as “a synthetic process that crystallized a variety of memories and emotional states into a public mood or moods conducive to militarist response” (Ross 2006:215). The response to 9/11 is partially the affective response the public had in response to the event as well as the visual and discursive representations of the event over time. Similarly, Sasley (2014:141) demonstrates the important link between affect and collective memory in the case of Turkish identity, illustrating how nonmaterial shared representations of a traumatic event, such as wars that occurred decades earlier, can have powerful resonance in memory, which in turn affects policymaking, even among individuals who did not experience the event directly.

As the preceding analysis suggests, emotions research lacks a single theory, theoretical perspective, or organizing framework, with many basic disagreements on ontology, conceptualization, measurement, and effects. The structure discussed above of latent/emergent and affective/cognitive is necessarily inadequate and incomplete, as many approaches to emotion resist strict classification, and there is significant heterogeneity of approach within each classification. Further, the poles of the axes are not mutually exclusive; though, identifying poles illustrates how emotions research has evolved, most notably a trend that emphasizes the affective effects of emotions and an understanding of emotions based on an emergence model in addition to a latent model. Interestingly, this trajectory parallels developments in the discipline of psychology and advances in affective neuroscience as well (Coan 2010). In IR, we have seen an evolution in emotions scholarship that is not unlike that experienced by other disciplines. Finally, the preceding discussion suggests that emotions research grapples with many of the same problems, such as agency-structure and material-ideational, that any theoretical approach to world politics must deal with at some level. Indeed, the emotions literature is complementary to that of constructivism’s initial theorizing in the 1990s: the latent-emergent axis loosely parallels Wendt’s (1999:22-3) axis of individualist-holist mapping of perspectives, whereas the affective-cognitive loosely parallels ideational-material.

The emphasis on the broad realm of affectivity in IR is an important development. Yet, we are still at an early stage in determining precisely what affect is and how it operates. One aspect of current theorizing of affect in IR is that it has tended to be viewed from an emergence perspective, which helps explain how group psychology is constructed, how moods may affect behaviors, and how affect may be produced through discourse. Less attention has been paid to how affect might be understood in the latent variable model. The upshot is that we know little

\(^\text{10}\) The cognitive-affective distinction in many ways is outdated or atavistic, particularly in psychology, though is still largely present in IR. My goal in delineating the literature in this way is to illustrate why the distinction has been important in the development of the belief bias, rather than to reify its existence in the first place.

\(^\text{11}\) In addition, scholars disagree on the extent to which affect precedes (Zajone 1980) or follows (Lazarus 1982) cognition, though recent research suggests the hybrid model (cf. Damasio 1994). The development of the hybrid model implies a spectrum, as reflected in Figure 1, rather than a binary division and therefore is different from earlier models that questioned precedence and temporal activity.
about the precise role of affect when it comes to individual decision making in IR. What does affect do to and for policymakers? Although Mercer and others examine the latent effects of emotion from a cognitive perspective, focused on belief construction, reasoning, and so forth, researchers have not yet applied the affective dimensions of individual decision making in IR.\textsuperscript{12} This is important to examine because psychologists and philosophers alike are increasingly convinced that our decision making is affected by affect, particularly affective intuitions. To not examine affect from a latent perspective risks missing an important causal variable in our IR theories.

As I argue below, the mind can solve high-level social and political problems automatically, without the type of searching and weighing of evidence that beliefs require. Importantly, these intuitions do not replace, but rather, reside alongside beliefs. This territory is admittedly highly complex, with many moving parts and conceptualizations that are often murky and may sometimes seem more similar in kind than different since they lack bright-line divisions, but theorizing the vast realm of affective intuitions has significant payoffs. By developing a way of thinking about intuitions that can problematize our existing models of decision, we can develop conditions under which we should expect intuitions to influence irrational behavior or reinforce rational belief. I suggest we think about this relationship in terms of beliefs and aliefs. It is to making that case that I now turn.

**Integrating Affect and Reasoning: Introducing Aliefs as Affective Intuitions**

“What is intuition all about?” Simon (1983:25) asked three decades ago, and the answer continues to elude. Intuition plays an important role in daily life and has been the subject of intense study in psychology, philosophy, and increasingly economics, though it has received less attention in IR. This is likely because of the dominance of rational-choice models that privilege reason and calculation based on evidence, or knowledge-based belief, over feelings or hunches. Researchers often view intuition pejoratively in decision making as the source of bias or irrationality that has little place in rationalist models of behavior (McDermott 2004b:212). After all, *homo economicus* is a rational cost–benefit calculating individual, not one prone to gut reactions and decisions based on instincts.

In foreign policy analysis, researchers surprisingly have not yet defined concretely the precise role of intuitions in decision making. Mintz and DeRouen (2010:17), for example, note that “wholistic” decisions are those that are made without regarding all the components of a decision and can be intuitive in nature, though they do not articulate what it means to have an intuitive decision. McDermott (2011:514) argues that intuition can increase the “speed, accuracy, and efficiency” of decision making and calls for further experimental work in the area, but leaves intuition largely undertheorized. Although scholars widely recognize that intuitions affect outcomes, under what conditions and what types of evidence point to such a role remains unclear. For example, as Siniver and Collins (2013:14) argue in their analysis of the Second Lebanon War, intuition about what historical analogy was most apt led to decision-making limitations. Quoting the Winograd report, they note a “natural tendency to reach conclusions mostly based on ‘gut feelings’ and intuition, without testing them against others with a different range of knowledge, experience, culture or ideology,” which in this particular case arguably led Israel into a war that it did not want. In attempting to pin down what this “natural tendency” is, Sasley (2010:693) notes that we should think about elites making decisions based not only on what they think about a particular issue or object, but what they feel about it. Affective attachments might lead to situations where emotional appeal is difficult to overcome and therefore leaders intuit particular decisions as the correct one to make. In the case of the Oslo Accords, the existence of an affective attachment to *Eretz Israel* with respect to Yitzhak Shamir but the nonexistence of that same attachment in Yitzhak Rabin helps to explain variations in the approach the two leaders took to Israeli–Palestinian negotiations.\textsuperscript{13}

Additional work on trust-building (such as the “instinct to cooperate,” Rathbun 2011:xiii), state cultural intimacy (the reproduction of multiple levels of identity that may produce particular “responses to international criticism akin to emotions,” Subotic and Zarakol 2013:932), and disrespect (including the “urge” or “[inclination] to act,” Wolf 2011:106, 120) also typically involve an intuitive component to decision making, even if the form and function of the intuition as a proclivity to action is left largely unspecified. In each case, affect is doing something to provide the “raw material” for intuitive decision making. These advances in articulating a role for intuitions in decision making are critically important as they highlight the ways in which affect and decision making come together at the individual-level in a latent variable sense. Further, they illustrate two “sides” of the intuition coin: Intuition can lead to both outcomes of war and peace, it does not carry with it a particular normative valence, and it may result in decision making that conforms to rational expectations.\textsuperscript{15}

I contribute to this discussion by suggesting that incorporating intuitions into IR and foreign policy analysis is necessary to understand a range of behaviors, but we need to articulate precisely what it is that intuitions are doing and how we should think about them if we are to identify the conditions under which intuitions lead to either deviations from, or support to, rational behavior. Lewis (1983:25) assumes that intuitions are opinions and thus essentially just forms of belief, although others find this problematic since individuals may believe something without having an intuition to that effect, or may have contradictory impulses between beliefs and intuitions (Pust 2012). Despite this disagreement on the precise relationship between intuition and belief, at the very least intuitions serve a *belief-like function* that is likely antecedent to belief and other cognitive states. The functions include the speed of knowing something, knowing without knowing how you know, and also knowing without a conscious step-by-step process (Hogarth 2001:4–24; Frantz

\textsuperscript{12} Sasley’s (2010) work on the affect heuristic is a notable exception, as I discuss below.

\textsuperscript{13} Note that Sasley does not use the term intuition to describe the affective attachment heuristic, though his analysis of the differences between Shamir and Rabin illustrate a strong role for affective intuition, as defined in this article, in accounting for how each leader made decisions regarding Oslo.

\textsuperscript{14} Italics in the original.

\textsuperscript{15} Or even perhaps exceed expectations. One area where intuition research is growing quickly is organizational management and finance, where some studies suggest a strong role for intuition in better decision-making (defined broadly as achieving positive outcomes, such as increasing profits). See, for example, Hensman and Sadler-Smith (2011:55–7).
2004:3). Frantz (2004:4) provides the examples of the mathematical problem $2 + 2 = 4$ or a triangle having three sides. Reasoning is not required for an individual to be certain of these relationships, though may well have been required at some point for the intuition to develop. Importantly, intuition can have many sources, including learned experience (which may become habitual), gut reactions that may not have identifiable sources, or reason (Holmes and Traven Forthcoming). Recent work in psychology suggests a role for intuition in creating moral judgments. Haidt (2001) argues that contra rationalistic models of moral judgment, individuals often use quick automatic affective evaluations, or intuitions, to come to moral conclusions. Thus, scholars use intuition in many different ways, sometimes with precise definitions and other times broadly to cover a wide range of phenomena.

A simple way of understanding intuition is to view it as a type of heuristic, as Sasley (2010) does, that bypasses conscious rational thought processes. A familiar example of this concept is found in Kahneman and Tversky’s research program in prospect theory. As Kahneman notes, “[our research] was guided by the idea that intuitive judgments occupy a position—perhaps corresponding to evolutionary history—between the automatic operations of perception and the deliberate operations of reasoning” (Kahneman 2003:697). Thus, two systems are in play: a fast instinctual system (“System 1”) coupled with a slower deliberate and logical system (“System 2.” Kahneman 2011). Uncertainty leads individuals to decisions based on their assessments of the environment and those assessments vary in predictable ways: Intuition can lead to decisions that are at odds with what neoclassical economic models would predict.

These insights help reveal “what intuition is all about.” First, intuition represents a general category of preanalytical nonreasoning-based knowing without knowing how you know. Intuitions are mental states that serve a belief-like function but are antecedent to beliefs. These are typically instantaneous responses to an environment or stimuli. Intuitions may be formed through affective processes or learned experience and play an important role in the decision-making process. Second, intuition is a part of rational reason-based decision making. This does not imply that all intuitions result in optimal decisions, but, perhaps counterintuitively, rational decisions often have an intuitive component.

By incorporating intuition into IR, we can better understand the interplay between beliefs and affective responses. Thinking about emotion as producing beliefs that are either rational or irrational not only makes it difficult to explain the complicated, though common, cases of rationally believing something but acting on something different, but also misses the role emotion plays in creating intuitions that can reinforce beliefs. We cannot articulate what it is that emotions actually do without paying attention to intuitions. Just as importantly, however, intuitions are quite broad and colloquial usage often invokes a variety of conceptualizations, creating ambiguity and leading scholars to use the same words to describe different actions. If intuitions are to be useful to IR, we need a precise way of thinking and talking about them. As noted above, since intuitions can lead to rational or irrational behaviors, and emotions and affect are integral to determining behavioral outcomes, we need to identify that relationship to understand under what conditions intuitions affect outcomes. Most importantly, if IR has a belief bias, then we need to identify what else is operational alongside beliefs. It is one thing to identify a bias, it is another to understand what that bias might make us overlook. This is where the concept of beliefs becomes central, to which I now turn.

Some philosophers argue that we may be thinking about the links between emotion and belief in the wrong ways. In instances of belief-discordant behavior, the individual experiences and intuits something that is at least potentially both rational and irrational concurrently. Gendler clarifies this concurrent relationship and also provides the specific properties of an intuition-like mental state. To do so, she invokes a modern version of a common thought experiment, the “problem of the precipice,” the Grand Canyon skywalk. As Gendler (2008a:635) argues, the basic phenomenon of stepping out onto a platform that you are quite sure is safe, inducing vertigo or fear, is familiar and unremarkable. Yet it is also a quite problematic example of something like an “emotional belief.” The person who decides to walk out onto the skywalk clearly believes, quite rationally, that they are safe. On one hand, as Gendler argues, no one would willingly step onto a platform that extends over a mile-high precipice if they were not quite certain that the activity was safe. On the other hand, something very different is occurring alongside this strong belief, a feeling of dread. While on the skywalk, individuals are likely to believe that they are perfectly safe, they are also concurrently experiencing a mental state that is quite the opposite. Gendler terms this alternate mental state belief. Although individuals on the skywalk firmly believe in their inherent safety, they are experiencing something completely different.

This example is one of many that have been cataloged over decades of research. Paul Rozin’s work on “sympathetic magic” is illustrative. Individuals will gladly eat a piece of chocolate in the shape of a square but not in the shape of dog feces. Similarly, individuals will not eat soup out of a brand-new sterilized bedpan or put a piece of rubber in the shape of vomit to their mouths (but they will if the rubber resembles a sink stopper). As Gendler notes, the individuals do not believe that the bedpan is dirty or that the chemical composition of the chocolate changes based on its shape, but they nevertheless hesitate in acting on these beliefs.

Horror movie enthusiasts often experience similar reactions. Walton (1978:5–6) discusses a scenario in which a patron of a horror film becomes agitated when green slime, which has been devouring everything in its path, turns its attention on the camera angle and, thus, the audience. As Gendler (2008a:637) notes, in this example, clearly the moviegoer does not believe that the slime is not real and he believes this. Yet, he is behaving completely differently. Similarly, the “urban effect,” where participants in computer game simulations are more likely to shoot unarmed individuals wearing turbans or hijabs, is present even when well-adjusted participants hold liberal beliefs regarding Muslims and espouse equality (Unkelhech, Forgas, and Denson 2008). The authors of the study indicate the strong role affective responses play in the outcome. In

16 Experimental work in this area includes a wide swath of behaviors, from sexual behaviors where individuals are aware of their deleterious actions but neverthelessprocure sex to fulfill emotional needs (Ariely and Loewenstein 2006), to simple decisions regarding which bowl has more red jelly beans than white ones in a gambling task (Denes-Raj and Epstein 1994). In many of these experiments, the subjects report believing what action they rationally should take, but end up pursuing alternate behaviors instead.
each of the examples, the rational belief held by the subject is clear. The Grand Canyon skywalk is safe, the chocolate in the shape of feces is edible, the slime is not invading the theater, and people wearing turbans should not be shot. The subjects in these studies and experiences have no problem admitting that these claims are all true. Yet, when it comes to behavior, something is amiss. The behavior is not matching the belief.

Although we can give rational interpretations to these behaviors, none are particularly convincing. For instance, one may argue that the behavior reveals some type of uncertainty about the situation. Maybe the individual who walks out onto the walkway is simply playing the odds, in a type of cost–benefit calculation, hoping that a low-probability outcome does not obtain, such as the skywalk falling apart or someone pushing the individual off the side. This does not hold up to scrutiny. The individuals who will not eat chocolate-as-feces are not playing the probabilities that the researcher has tricked them into eating feces. Indeed, the same reaction obtains even if they consciously think to themselves that the feces is chocolate. It is therefore hard to equate stepping onto the walkway with a version of Russian roulette.

Similarly, these are not cases of forgetfulness or self-deception. Individuals who hesitate to eat the chocolate have not momentarily forgotten that it is not chocolate. It also seems unlikely that individuals stepping onto the walkway have forgotten that it is safe. Self-deception may be a candidate, but there is a problem of what the subjects report: They exhibit little difficulty in endorsing the belief that runs contrary to their behavior. Therefore, they are not convincing themselves that the walkway is not safe or that the chocolate is actually feces. Indeed, they consciously admit that these are not the cases. And since the reaction persists beyond this reflection, it is likely that it is not limited to “System 1.” It is, put simply, a reaction that sticks.

What these examples illustrate is the existence of a specific mental state that is, at least potentially, belief-discordant. The effect of this mental state, in its most simple formulation, is that we often find ourselves in situations where “[o]ur beliefs and desires mandate pursuing behavior B and abstaining from behavior A, but we nonetheless find ourselves acting—or feeling a propensity to act—in A-like ways” (Gendler 2012:799). This particular mental state has representational-affective-behavioral content and is strongly influenced by affective intuition. The mental state is termed alief because it is “associative, action-generating, affect-laden, irrational, automatic, agnostic with respect to its content, shared with animals, and developmentally and conceptually antecedent to other cognitive attitudes” (Gendler 2008a:642; see also 2008b:557–8). The reason such a formulation is necessary is precisely because of the perplexing phenomena of belief-behavior discordance that would otherwise be unexplainable. As Gendler (2008a:642) argues, “either such phenomena remain overlooked or misdescribed, or they seem to mandate such a radical reconceptualization of the relation between cognition and behavior that traditional notions like belief seem quaint and inadequate.” Existing explanations for these “A” behaviors, such as habit or instinct fail to capture the complexity of the experience, precisely because “their pursuit runs contrary to what our reflective commitments mandate” but they are also neither “fully reflexive or automatic” (Gendler 2012:799). We are therefore in territory where the behavior looks very much like it should be based in beliefs, but it is not.

It is worth addressing why aliefs cannot simply be subsumed into belief. One reason is that beliefs are propositional attitudes that involve acceptance. Alieving, on the other hand, does not require this condition (Gendler 2008a:648). To illustrate this point, Gendler cites a study by Rozin where subjects saw “sugar poured into two bottles, and then applied labels of sugar and sodium cyanide, each to one of the bottles, making their own choice” (Rozin, Markwith, and Ross 1990:383). Even though the subjects applied the labels themselves, they “showed a reluctance to consume sugar from the cyanide labeled bottle” (Rozin et al. 1990:383). Perhaps, however, the alief here is accepting that the substance is actually sodium cyanide and not sugar. Bottles that are labeled “not sodium cyanide, not poison” produce a similar effect (Rozin et al. 1990:383–4). This also suggests that the actions are not about signaling or symbolic value. If the study participants were worried about embarrassment or communicating something to the study organizers about themselves, we would expect that embarrassment would drive them to eat the sugar rather than avoid it.

Aliefs involve “the activation of an associative chain—and this is something that can happen regardless of the attitude that one bears to the content activating the associations” (Gendler 2008a:650). This is important since many existing explanations of the types of behavior Gendler is referring to, and will become relevant in the discussion of the security dilemma, have focused on one holding multiple beliefs simultaneously. If aliefs cannot be subsumed into beliefs, then we are in the realm of a new category of mental state. Finally, the arational character of aliefs does not just come into conflict with rational beliefs but can also support them as well. Therefore, aliefs have the potential to both undermine and enhance rationality. Indeed, as Gendler (2012:809) argues, aliefs are best illustrated by the large class of belief-discordant examples, but they also “[govern] most of our actions, most of the time.”

What this suggests is that a wide range of belief-discordant behaviors cannot sufficiently be explained, or examined empirically, with traditional appeals to emotion and beliefs alone. To do so either misses the nature of the phenomena or misdescribes the complexity of the mental states involved. Further, because aliefs can also enhance rationality, not accounting for them misses a key component in the motivation of rational behavior. Finally, because aliefs are antecedent to beliefs, and beliefs have been the focus of much empirical inquiry in decision making, the evidence we use in supporting our theories is not reflective of the complexity of the decision-making process. This new formulation of belief and alief helps to clarify complex processes and interactions into more simple, and yet powerful, conceptualizations, shown in Table 1.

Ultimately, rather than viewing beliefs and behaviors in terms of being either rational or irrational, introducing aliefs allows us to understand how the two can coexist. Thus, we can make an addition to the familiar belief + desire = action framework and amend it as alief + belief + desire = action. This implies, though does not require, the possibility of contradictory aliefs and beliefs, resulting in situations where we believe we should do B but alieve we should do A. Aliefs can also reinforce existing beliefs. In the following section, I examine the plausibility of aliefs aiding a rereading of a crucial concept of international politics: the security dilemma.
Believing This and Alieving That: The Security Dilemma

In this section (and the supplementary material that is available online), I draw attention to IR theory that may benefit from understanding the alief versus belief distinction. My aim is not to provide a full empirical test of the theory, but rather to introduce cases illustrative of the security dilemma where aliefs may be present and examining them provides insight into existing puzzles. In doing so, I seek to test the plausibility of the claim that belief/alief mismatch may result in particular behaviors. Further, my aim is not to rule out alternate explanations, but rather to add to and complement existing views on these important areas of IR. Existing rationalist models of evaluating the security dilemma, for example, are not necessarily wrong. Indeed, I believe they provide useful insights into a logic that may be occurring among policymakers who find themselves in these situations. However, I suggest an alternate model that may help us to more fully understand both the logic of the dilemma and behaviors that result.

The security dilemma (SD) is perhaps the best-known conjecture about how hostilities escalate and violence begins (Jervis 1978). The dilemma occurs because policymakers must decide whether military developments by others constitute offense or defense and whether enhancing military capabilities at home will provoke others to do the same. This logic relies on anxiety, weapon indistinguishability, and fear. Because under anarchy states cannot be certain of the intentions of others and each method of approximating intentions is inherently imprecise, states, at least according to realists, are said to be fearful of each other, fueling the dilemma. As Jervis (1976:82) and others argue, eliminating the SD is impossible: “The security dilemma cannot be abolished.”

Importantly, this view of not being able to eliminate the SD may underestimate, or neglect, the scope for individual agency. As Booth and Wheeler (2008:7) argue, part of what makes the SD transcendable is an individual-level attitudinal variable they call security dilemma sensibility.

Security dilemma sensibility is an actor’s intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behavior, including, crucially, the role that one’s own actions may play in provoking that fear.

Although the problem of other minds arguably remains (though see Holmes 2013), Booth and Wheeler (2008:7) argue that it does not follow that policymakers “will always fail in their attempts to know and act upon another’s fears.” Indeed some, those with high levels of SD sensibility, can effectively empathize with the other, realize how one’s behavior contributes to the dilemma, and respond in such a way that mitigates the dilemma. This is the rational response. Those with SD sensibility believe that they know the most efficient response, even taking the uncertainty of the other into account. Having established how individual agency may play a role in the SD, I turn to examining the logic of this particular type of dilemma from an alief-belief mismatch perspective.

The source of the dilemma in the case where policymakers possess SD sensibility is an alief about proper action under uncertainty. Unable to know the intentions of others, states that find themselves in a dilemma are necessarily intuiting unclear intentions and reacting to them in fear. The dilemma is that the policymakers, by possessing SD sensibility, believe that they may be intuiting negative intentions because of the dynamics of the situation and by add-
ing security they may be exacerbating the situation. One believes that adding security may make the situation worse, but one believes that it is the prudent strategy.

This dynamic is famously in play in prewar Britain in 1909 as its Parliament decided how to proceed in the escalation of hostilities with Germany. Sir Edward Grey (1909:cc61), British Foreign Secretary, takes a nuanced position, arguing for maintaining Britain’s naval superiority, while simultaneously understanding the ramifications:

Remember, in Germany there is apprehension with regard to our intentions. I am constantly told... that one of the reasons why German public opinion is apprehensive is the fear that we may be preparing an attack upon them—a most wild apprehension. But see how an increase of naval expenditure, how debates of this kind... must foster these ideas in the mind of the public... Deeply as I feel... the great evil of increased naval and military expenditure not only here but in Europe... we must be prepared to defend our national existence.

Crucially, Grey exhibits SD sensibility. As Snyder (1997:332) argues, “[t]here was no one more sensitive to the composite security dilemma than Sir Edward Grey.” Grey indicates that by deciding to build up the navy, he is exacerbating the problem by fostering the idea in mind of the German public that an attack may be imminent. Thus, just as one believes walking on the suspended walkway is safe yet the behavior is one that exhibits latent fears, so too does the SD suggest that policymakers believe that they are contributing to insecurity as they build their capabilities. Yet, precisely because of the latent existential affective fears that accompany these decisions, the belief is represented in the resulting behavior. Emotional beliefs that result in worst-case scenario thinking and rational beliefs come into contradiction.

This is a different interpretation than is normally given, which often revolves around the existence of two beliefs, both of which are rational, but to act on one is slightly less foreboding than the other. In this interpretation, Grey understands the dynamics of the situation and believes two things: Adding to the military may provoke Germany, but in the absence of trust, it is better to arm than not arm to avoid being the “sucker.” The calculus that Grey is engaging in involves a cost–benefit analysis of his options and analysis of the trade-offs. His thick-process is not planning for worst-case scenario but simply choosing the least costly option. Grey (1909:cc69) notes that although military expenditures have grown in Europe to satirical levels, no one country alone can stop the wave:

If we alone, along the great powers, gave up the competition and sank into a position of inferiority, what good should we do? None whatever... we cannot realize great ideals of social reform at home when we are holding our existence at the mercy, at the caprice, if you like, of another nation.

However, there are reasons to be cautious in reading Grey as pursuing a cost–benefit strategy based in rational belief rather than worst-case-scenario thinking. First, Grey notes that he sees “a wide space in which [Germany and Britain] may walk in peace and amity,” with “two extreme things [producing] conflict” (Grey 1909:cc57). The first is the British attempt to isolate Germany; the second German attempt to isolate and dominate England. But “between these two extremes of isolation and domination, there is a wide space in which the two nations can walk together in a perfect friendly way” (Grey 1909:cc58). Importantly, Grey views the likelihood of either side pursing an isolation strategy as unlikely:

and just as there is no reason to apprehend on our part that we shall pursue a policy of the isolation of Germany, so also I see just as little reason to apprehend that Germany will pursue a deliberate policy of isolation of this country. (Grey 1909:cc58)

Grey accepts Germany’s stated intentions “in all good faith” (Grey 1909:cc61). Indeed, both sides have “carefully avoided in all our relations anything which was likely to make difficulty of mischief, directly or indirectly, between these two powers” (Grey 1909:cc58). Grey goes on to note that what could potentially sour these feelings of “peace and goodwill” (Grey 1909:cc58) would be the spoiling of public opinion that comes from increases in naval expenditure. He makes a strong argument for pursuing a course of cessation of naval competition, which would result in “public opinion everywhere [taking it] as a guarantee of the good intentions of the two nations” (Grey 1909:cc59) through arrangements such as a general agreement on limits of naval building with information-sharing between the two nations. Although such an agreement is “unprecedented,” “so is the expenditure” (Grey 1909:cc59). Finally, the affactive environment in which these discussions take place is one of fear. As Waterhouse (2013:201–2) argues, Britain was feeling particularly insecure “[s]toked up” by the press in a strong campaign to encourage naval production in this “life and death” situation.

Therefore, Grey is making an informed and nuanced argument regarding likelihood of conflict with Germany. He indicates that only extreme moves would result in conflict, that as long as both sides continue what they have done in the past, good diplomatic relations should continue. He argues that arrangements are possible that would allow for a reduction in naval power between the two nations and that significant potential for amity and peace exist. Although always difficult to deduce the mental states of others through public discourse and limited available evidence, we can find support for an belief-based interpretation. Grey eloquently outlines the various reasons why Britain need not be concerned about the lack of trust in this context, indicating his ability to empathize with the other, and convincingly argues that Germany possesses SD sensibility as well. He makes reasoned and rational arguments for believing that ceasing military buildup is prudent. Yet his argumentation also demonstrates the existence of the belief that, despite these well-reasoned perspectives, building naval power is necessary. Scholars

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17 Though see Tang (2008:458–61) on worst-case-thinking in the SD.

18 Scholars

It is important to note that my aim is not to definitively illustrate that Grey’s thought-process was motivated by beliefs, but rather to raise an alternate understanding of the SD dynamics. In this case, both interpretations arguably have support, though belief-based understanding has yet to be advanced in the literature. Further, it is not necessarily the case that these interpretations compete so much as they complement. Some SDs may be caused by rational cost–benefit calculations. Others are likely caused by worst-case-thinking. Highlighting the possibility of an belief-based explanation does not imply that rationalist models of decision-making are wrong but helps to inform a more complete understanding of how decisions are made under uncertainty.
have noted Britain’s position at this time as one of “determined political ambiguity” (Coogan and Coogan 1985:127). Yet careful analysis suggests that Grey’s position is only ambiguous if one is looking for beliefs that support Britain’s behavior; from an alief perspective Grey is highlighting the irrationality of the SD with great precision.

Importantly then, certain SDs may not necessarily be based on the presence of two rational beliefs that come into contradiction. If Grey believes that increasing capabilities will ultimately make Britain less secure, then this is a rational belief. If the resulting behavior is moving ahead with the buildup, then that behavior must stem from an affective response since one cannot hold rationally that a buildup of capabilities simultaneously makes one more secure and less secure at the same time. The contradiction is between an alief about existential safety and rational belief, not between two rational beliefs or propositions that are held to be true. If Grey possesses SD sensibility, then rationality in this case has been compromised and attempts to explain the decision making through a rational cost–benefit analysis seem to suffer from the same problems that such an analysis suffered with the skywalk.

The alief–belief distinction also resonates with arguments regarding the continued existence of SDs resulting from habits (Hopf 2010) and routines (Mitzen 2006). From this perspective, SDs stem from habitual response rather than evaluating and weighing rational beliefs. In Mitzen’s case, the routines often feel right even though they arguably further their material insecurity. Put into language of aliefs, it may be that individuals under this structure believe that continuing their routines exacerbates and prolongs their security problem, yet nevertheless believe that this is the proper course of action. Feeling is not believing, but the feeling is motivating behavior.

These dynamics are not limited to Grey’s understanding of Britain’s security situation. As Booth and Wheeler have documented, there is evidence to suggest salient moments of diplomatic history have been affected by beliefs regarding SD sensibility that are belied by behavior. Scholars often interpret the Cold War in SD terms (though see Jervis 2001:58 on this debate), with the United States and Soviet Union engaged in deep suspicion of the other, responding to beliefs that it was prudent to build capabilities in fear of aggression from the other side. These beliefs are understood to change as Mikhail Gorbachev took office in 1985, either because of Soviet economic decline and the inability to keep up with the United States, or “new thinking” that privileged trust-building and creation of mutual-security and cooperation over competition. In the latter interpretation, Gorbachev recognized the existence of the SD and changes foreign policy behaviors to signal cooperation, significantly transforming US–Soviet relations from 1986 onward.

Yet, some evidence suggests that the Soviets believed, as early as 1982, that their military buildup contributed to insecurity rather than security. Vlecheslav I. Dashi chev, advisor to General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR Yuri Andropov, in a memorandum to Andropov “faulted the Soviet Union for allowing the West to see Soviet policies as expansionistic, and the Soviet military buildup as unrelenting, and emphasized the importance of reassuring the adversary about one’s own intentions” (Mastny 2003:10). Dashchev describes the SD and the effects of reactionary behavior on fueling insecurity. This illustrates that at least some Soviet policymakers were aware, as early as 1982 and well before Gorbachev came into power, that their actions contributed to insecurity. They continued, despite this belief, to both expand militarily, most notably their nuclear arsenal, which did not peak in production until 1986,20 and provoke the United States. As Georgi Arbatov, US specialist in the Kremlin, noted in April 1983, the relationship suffered “tremendous deterioration,” resulting in a situation that was worse than any time since the Cuban missile crisis (Laequeur 1983). It would take another three to four years before behavior became congruent with rationally held beliefs about increasing capabilities resulting in decreased security. Interestingly, US President Ronald Reagan also adopted similar beliefs as early as 1983. As Wheeler (2013:489) argues, the Able Archer episode in November caused Reagan to reassess the beliefs that the Soviets might hold regarding the United States, poignantly asking his National Security Advisor whether it was possible that the Soviets were acting out of fear and really did not believe the United States was peaceful. As with the Grey case in Britain, despite possessing SD sensibility and understanding its effects on insecurity, deep fear ultimately led to behaviors that belied rational beliefs in the case of the Soviet Union. Thus, in the end at least some instances of the SD, and perhaps the underlying logic of SD sensibility, can be understood through alief-driven belief-discordance.

Special Problems, Empirical Designs, and Conclusions

We need to take intuitions seriously in IR. Emerging models of decision making suggest an important role for intuitions in producing behaviors, not just when standing on a skywalk but when making political decisions as well. Despite the difficulty of investigating the intricacies of decision making—particularly the complex and somewhat ambiguous aspects of emotion and affect in which intuitions may be at work—we will likely reap significant payoffs from doing so. Specifically, I argue that incorporating Gendler’s alief mental state into the familiar desire + belief = action model provides great explanatory leverage. It helps us make sense of those paradoxical instances where behaviors and behavior conflict with one another. My illustrations of such circumstances provide a warrant for further empirical analysis.

Aliefs may prove important to a wide range of behaviors, and thus to a number of diverse debates across the discipline. Uncertain situations with high emotional, social, or crisis diplomacy, seem particularly prone to conflicts between beliefs and aliefs. Given latent uncertainty generated by an anarchical international system in which crises proliferate, the dynamics described in this study may be particularly prevalent. Enduring rivalries seem to exhibit many of the disgust characteristics

19 It is of course difficult to know how widely shared the beliefs conveyed in the Dashchev memo were, who read it, or how seriously Andropov took the arguments in 1982, though as Booth and Wheeler (2008:147–8) argue, “the fact that such ideas were floating around among the policy-making elite is significant.”

discussed in the Rozin examples. Disrespect, which may “constrain information processing and promote strong reactions against the disrespectful actor,” leading to “more risk prone and more aggressive behavior” (Wolf 2011:129), may also operate in rivalry situations. International norms, which help to construct beliefs about action, may benefit from incorporating aliefs in order to understand norm-concordant and norm-discordant behaviors. Gendler argues that aliefs are present in residual racism and gender stereotyping, prompting behaviors inconsistent with reasoned beliefs. Indeed, emotions and intuition likely play a role in all decision making, including rational belief construction and resulting choices. Determining under what conditions aliefs enhance rationality constitutes an important part of the research agenda that I propose.

Clearly, we face challenges. First, the ontological status of alief is a philosophical position. We cannot see aliefs in the brain or delineate precise conditions under which aliefs materialize. As an unobservable and a neologism, scholars may dispute their very existence. Further, alternate explanations—particularly belief-updating and holding multiple beliefs—present themselves in many cases that we might turn to aliefs for explanatory leverage. Political decision making and action is usually strategic and dyadic in nature. If policymakers carry out policies that they believe are actually irrational, but they also believe may satisfy expectations of voters or other actors, then acting on the alief may present little puzzle for rational-choice heuristics. Future research must compare predictions and outcomes from belief-only and belief–alief models. Relatedly, structural contexts and social settings critically affect aliefs. Thus, we must critically compare the hypothesized configuration of beliefs, aliefs, and desires that lead to particular behaviors with competing explanations, such as the existence of alternate beliefs that decision makers may hold. Finally, my analysis focuses on the individual level of analysis. Although aliefs likely operate at the group level—as do beliefs and emotions—isolating the alief at work in group behavior presents an important and thorny methodological challenge for future research.

Ultimately, the difficulty of studying mental states, such as aliefs and beliefs, resides in finding an independent measure of something internal to the individual. Such activities have recently come under scrutiny because of the unsatisfying nature of much empirical research that attempts to account for the unobservable motivations of individuals. This leads Krebs and Jackson (2007:36) to argue that analysts should focus on what actors say rather than attempt to account for what motivates them. This perspective is compelling when we consider the empirical demands involved with uncovering mental states. For strong empirical tests in a case study, we need the true mechanics of the decision making. We can strengthen internal validity via laboratory experimental design. Researchers in social cognition study ways to measure unobservables, such as attitudes, and over the course of the last few decades developed sophisticated tools for doing so. Psychologists involved in measuring implicit attitudes recognize the difficulty of measuring these concepts, in part because of the unwillingness or inability of individuals to self-report their mental states. Accordingly, they develop laboratory experiments that prime subjects with particular emotions or affective and then measure responses to a variety of stimuli and prompts.

21 For debate regarding the philosophical existence and properties of aliefs, see the recent correspondence between Gendler and critics in Analysis 72 (4) as well as Mandelbaum (2013) and Gendler (2010).

22 Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for raising this point.

23 See also the special issue of Journal of Conflict Resolution (February 2004; 48 (1)).
We can do the same with IR topics, both with current or retired policymakers (Renshon Forthcoming) as well as undergraduate students. By assessing prior beliefs and personality through pretests, manipulating variables such as emotional and affective priming, and embedding the participants in a complicated simulated policy environment, researchers can measure behavioral responses compared with control groups. Determining the differential effects of types of emotions will prove particularly valuable; because individuals possess different concerns and perspectives, it follows that different emotions, such as fear or compassion, likely motivate different behaviors. We could then compare behavior with self-reports of beliefs to examine the relationship between the belief and behavior. This potentially allows researchers to identify the conditions—specifically the valence of emotion and type of emotion required—under which rational belief-discordant or belief-concordant behaviors obtain. Further, we can identify the relationship between preexisting beliefs and belief construction. Although individuals often struggle to define an emotion they experience with precision in any given instance, they may be able to describe the contradictory impulses they feel in a policy scenario. Participants in the Rozin studies, for example, do so. Contradiction between beliefs and beliefs, in other words, may prove more empirically tenable than belief alone.

References


