a new subfield, Behavioral IR, is introduced in this essay. Its goal is to enrich the study of international affairs by incorporating Behavioral concepts and factors into IR research (Mintz 2005a). Six characteristics of Behavioral IR were introduced as well as relevant concepts, units of analysis, methods, and potential research questions. Behavioral IR is concerned with how cognitive limitations, psychological factors, and susceptibility to biases affect IR. The goal of Behavioral IR is to enrich understanding of international politics.

**Behavioral IR: Practical Suggestions**

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Mintz in the previous essay in this Forum advocates a potentially exciting addition to the disciplinary matrix of IR: the creation of Behavioral IR. Such a subfield would recognize the value of going beyond rational choice as a vision of human behavior, while at the same time seeking to complement rather than eliminate that way of looking at the world. Behavioral IR, according to Mintz, also would bring greater unity and coherence to approaches from political psychology that have proven to be valuable on an individual basis. Mintz identifies a range of “biases and anomalies” that continue to challenge rationality models of decision making, such as framing effects, wishful thinking, and groupthink, among others. For such reasons, he sees Behavioral IR as a way to bring together various strands from political psychology to enhance explanatory power.

This essay, which is intended to extend Mintz’s introduction to Behavioral IR, will proceed in three stages. Discussion will begin with a specific suggestion about what to do next in the promotion and development of this subfield. This proposal is followed by a consideration of some basic issues, such as the role of Behavioral IR in accounting for preference formation and problems related to scientific progress, which are critical to its becoming a subfield. Finally, some concluding thoughts will convey a positive position on the viability of Behavioral IR as a subfield of IR.

**What to Do Next?**

What might be done to develop the subfield of Behavioral IR, now that it exists in the abstract? One possible step forward would be to create a new section in the International Studies Association (ISA) to enhance communication and synergy among a latent research community. Within ISA as it currently exists, some sections would appear to overlap significantly with the mandate of Behavioral IR, whereas others are more distant. Among the fairly obvious cognate sections are diplomatic studies, foreign policy analysis, and the scientific study of international processes. Each of these sections involves scholars who study behavior, even though these sections are identified more by their respective substantive agendas and methods than by an ontology that corresponds to the one put forward by Mintz. For example, the first and third sections mentioned above contrast in their general adoption of qualitative and quantitative methods, respectively. The second section is perhaps closer to Behavioral IR than any other in the ISA, but its members do not actively seek a synthesis of the kind advocated by Mintz. Thus, a new Behavioral IR section in ISA might have value in facilitating dialogue between and among existing sections that, in some cases, tend to work independently. This point comes directly to mind when looking over Mintz’s list of questions that could be studied using Behavioral IR. War initiation appears on the list, along with strategic surprise, the
democratic peace, diversionary uses of force, and terrorists’ decisions. Scholars familiar with ISA could probably easily identify one or more sections within the organization that have members interested in these questions. What a Behavioral IR section could do is bring together these different research communities, facilitating scholars’ efforts to compare findings about what may at first glance appear to be superficially unconnected, but perhaps more deeply related, research problems.

**Issues to Consider**

One positive aspect of Behavioral IR is its ability to address directly the issue of preference formation. The prominent rational choice paradigm takes preferences as exogenous and then moves on to assess the likelihood of respective outcomes as a product of strategic interaction. Behavioral IR could help us increase our understanding as well as explanation, in the sense of Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1991), by providing us with an ability to say more about the origins of preferences. When unexpected outcomes do sometimes occur, rationality models frequently can explain such outcomes. But these models do not say why the subjects of study come to adopt the preferences they exhibit through relatively well-predicted behavior. A model of how preferences evolve as a result of experience would go beyond the boundaries of rational choice as it is implemented now.

Take, for example, the fascinating treatment of the “Columbus/Ferdinand” game in Bruce Bueno de Mesquita’s (2005) text, which has become the standard textbook for introducing students to the field of IR from a strategic perspective. In the game, Christopher Columbus approaches King Ferdinand in order to obtain support for his intended voyage across the Atlantic to reach the riches of the Orient. As would be expected in this game of strategic interaction, Columbus prefers a high subsidy whereas Ferdinand prefers a low subsidy. Columbus, who moves first in the game, must be careful, however, not to alienate the King, who might be willing to provide limited but not full support for the proposed expedition. As revealed by rankings for the respective outcomes, the Nash equilibrium (that is, the predicted outcome) of the game is that the voyage indeed will take place, but with the low level of subsidy preferred by the monarch. This outcome occurs if Columbus optimizes by requesting only a limited amount of support. The result is a product of the way preferences are distributed across the four outcomes and corresponds to one of seventy-eight unique $2 \times 2$ game matrices. All these games, of course, could be investigated via Behavioral IR with regard to formation of preferences in various historical contexts.

Behavioral IR could potentially add significantly to the understanding of the outcome of the Columbus/Ferdinand game as explained by the model. For example, does the choice made by Ferdinand to support Columbus’ expedition reflect, to some degree, “wishful thinking” (Mintz 2006)? It is known that experts at the time understood that (a) the world was round and, therefore, (b) believed that Columbus would never be able to make it to Asia given the extraordinary distance involved. Thus, even a small amount of support for Columbus based on these odds might be regarded as a poorly justified position on the part of the King. Perhaps Ferdinand’s preference formation on the issue can be traced to the same kind of wishful thinking that motivates the buyers of lottery tickets. For a very small expenditure, in other words, Ferdinand took a chance that Columbus somehow would produce a major payoff in spite of the odds.

Although Mintz identifies a promising way forward for IR, criteria concerning scientific progress create some concerns. For instance, will the new edifice of Behavioral IR be falsifiable? What is the likely tradeoff in terms of added understanding and explanation in return for such intricate and internally complex theorizing? Consider, for example, a few items from the list of concepts Mintz attributes to behavioral scholarship: beliefs and belief systems, groupthink,
emotions, and both motivated and unmotivated biases. These four concepts alone produce sixteen pairwise relationships that could be either logically consistent, contradictory, or mutually irrelevant. Given that all the listed concepts pertain to decision-making psychology, the last of these three possibilities is unlikely for any given pairwise comparison. Instead, it will be important, scientifically speaking, to sort out “what is consistent with what” before Behavioral IR can complement rational choice to maximum advantage.

Connecting the concepts with each other systematically is the natural way forward for Behavioral IR. To illustrate, consider the possible ways that emotions and analogies could interact in terms of causal linkages. Are analogies called upon in response to emotions? Perhaps a sense of time pressure and threat—conditions associated with a crisis—make it more likely that an analogy of some kind will be used to simplify matters and permit more rapid decision making coupled with a sense of safety that is obtained by focusing on a positive outcome from the past. In addition, what about emotions and biases in relation to each other? Is it possible that the existence of motivated bias could produce anger, and thereby impair decision making even further, in a response to criticism? What if motivated bias exists as a result of a belief system that creates the disposition to a particular analogy with past experience? Furthermore, groupthink might come into the process at multiple stages, perhaps in the form of protecting a leader’s “pet” analogy from criticism and, in turn, be reinforced by hostile emotions directed at those who express skepticism about the favored historical parallel.

Such speculation about cause and effect among the concepts just noted is sufficient to identify a major challenge for Behavioral IR. An organizing principle is needed for its numerous potential components. Mintz provides a set of six axioms for this subfield, but these are abstract principles—perhaps described best as a set of ontological statements and methodological rules. For example, leaders are assumed to exhibit bias; research should focus on process as well as outcome; and so on. But how are behavioral actors and concepts related to each other in a causal framework that is integrated and possesses the potential for orderly and logically consistent expansion? That question requires a convincing response if Behavioral IR is to achieve its full potential.

Systemism may provide the answer to this key question. This perspective rejects both holism and individualism in favor of a more complete specification of cause and effect (Bunge 1996; see also James 2002a, 2002b). To start, any system includes linkages at the macro or micro levels. For the sake of simplicity, assume at this point that macro refers to “interstate” and micro to “state” in the context of IR. A macro–macro orientation to the world, such as structural realism, would focus on entities such as the distribution of capabilities among states and how it might be connected to the frequency of war or other type of conflict. By contrast, a micro–micro perspective would look at individual states; the vast research program that focuses on the dyadic democratic peace would be an example here (James 2002a).

Systemism, however, goes beyond macro–macro and micro–micro theorizing to include hybrid linkages as well: macro–micro and micro–macro. In this way, it permits a full inventory of propositions within a given system and can provide the foundation for developing Behavioral IR in an incremental manner. As linkages accumulate, they can be placed within a developing network of connections that operate within the micro and macro levels and across them as well.

Consider the thirteen actors and twenty-five concepts that Mintz enumerated earlier in this Forum as playing a role within Behavioral IR. (Even though these actors and concepts are described as examples rather than as an exhaustive list, the argument that follows would merely be strengthened by the addition of further items, not changed.) Such a list creates a vast number of potential linkages in terms of cause and effect. It is well beyond the scope of this piece to work through even a
significant proportion of the possibilities, but it is feasible to illustrate how theorizing could take place with these actors and concepts. At the micro level, consider the behavior of political candidates who try to outdo each other in a situation of ethnic outbidding. This competition could affect public beliefs and make them highly unfavorable toward the intended outgroups. Belief systems could be altered and an enemy image could become entrenched. All the concepts just noted, of course, are among those enumerated by Mintz—and the example might correspond at least loosely to the tragedy of the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Consider another example, this time starting with a macro–micro connection. International organizations might prove disappointing to the public of a given country, which in turn expects political candidates to take more unilateral action to get results on priority issues. This behavior, in turn, could produce a poliheuristic bias in decision making that might produce an escalation in interstate conflict. Some might see the preceding causal chain as having some connection to the United States in relation to the United Nations over the last few years. The purpose of these two examples is not to suggest any definitive arguments, of course, but only to show how Behavioral IR and systemism might be used to mutual benefit.

Another point concerning scientific progress, quite favorable in its implications with regard to Behavioral IR, concerns some widely held perceptions about the state of IR as a discipline. Mintz’s Behavioral IR reveals consilience with Michael Brecher’s (1999) presidential address to the ISA that emphasized the obstacles to synthesis in the discipline of IR posed by “flawed dichotomies.” Brecher identified several divisive debates in IR, each of which manifested a generally intolerant attitude and a lack of willingness to learn from those on the other side. Prominent among the flawed dichotomies is “rational calculus versus psychological constraints on choice” (Brecher 1999). By defining and advocating Behavioral IR, Mintz addresses this problem in a way that also might help alleviate some of the other problems noted by Brecher, such as inductive versus deductive paths to theory and large-versus small-N analysis. Clearly, if Behavioral IR adopts a systemist frame of reference and investigates all four of the possible kinds of linkage, from macro–macro downward through micro–micro, both the means of theorizing and the compilation of evidence will need to be inclusive for real progress to be made. Depending upon the unit of analysis and, thus, the type of behavior at issue, it is easy to see an essential place for both case studies and statistical analysis in Behavioral IR. Furthermore, this subfield could move forward either through the accumulation of individually confirmed hypotheses or the testing of more encompassing frameworks with interconnected propositions.

Concluding Thoughts

This contribution to the Forum says “yes” to the viability of Behavioral IR as a subfield in IR. Behavioral IR could even become a major contributor to moving the discipline forward. Only time will tell whether the promise identified here will be fulfilled.

Back to the Future? Behavioral IR as a Case of Arrested Development

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Alex Mintz calls in his essay in this Forum for recognizing “Behavioral IR” as a subfield in the study of IR. He rests his case on the existence of “numerous