

Affective Politics After 9/11

A cataclysm occurs. The senses reel. In that moment of supreme definition we capture in our imagination an event's full significance. Over time, it is not that the memory of it fades, exactly... The emotional impact is replaced by a sentiment which, because it is more calm, seems more rational. But paradoxically it can be less rational, because the calm is not the product of a changed analysis, but the effluxion of time... So it was with 11 September 2001. –Tony Blair¹

There is a subjectively felt dimension to human experience, spanning the slight twinges of intuition to the internal tumult of strong passions. Such feelings evince affective dynamics that operate within us as embodied mental states and processes without ever being fully under our control. Although these affective dynamics are key elements of our lived existence, neither of the two currently prevailing conceptualizations of actorhood in IR explicitly takes them into account. Rationalist approaches posit actors with fixed, complete, and transitively ordered preferences, who act upon beliefs about the options available in a given situation in order to best realize their goals. Constructivists, in contrast, theorize actors who behave according to social norms, practices, or identities. In this latter view, the very capacity for political actorhood is socially constructed. While possessing important differences, both approaches share a cognitivist outlook that, by focusing almost exclusively on beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge, virtually disembodies its actors.

In this paper, we propose a series of amendments for integrating affective experience into existing understandings of actorhood in IR. We begin at the individual level, where we

¹ Blair 2010, 341.

distinguish between two basic varieties of affective experience—namely high and low intensity—and identify their latent sources of activation in concerns, dispositions, and the capacity for affective mirroring. While taking these affective processes into account does not automatically invalidate the insights of rational choice or constructivism, it does uncover additional channels through which the external environment can shape beliefs and preferences, color judgment, focus attention, and elicit action.

Although we take the individual as our fundamental theoretical building block for heuristic purposes, adequately addressing the impact of affective dynamics in IR entails further tracing how they are woven into the collective entities that populate international politics. Affective experience has important social dimensions; theorizing these requires more than simply scaling-up, as if groups experienced affective responses in a manner analogous to individuals. We therefore proffer a second stage of theorizing that delineates the pathways whereby collective affective experience can occur: bottom-up through shared concerns and dispositions, horizontally across individuals through contagion, and top-down as a result of social harmonizing processes. These pathways, in turn, form the conditions of possibility for two important collective-level effects: affective waves and emergent collective solidarities.

But endowing actors with affect does not strip from them the potential for strategic behavior. In a third stage of theorizing, we show how individual and collective affective dynamics make possible distinct forms of strategic intervention. Actors may seek to play upon the emotions of others; provoke politically advantageous emotional responses; or sow long-term affective attachments, sensitivities, and allegiances. Affective dynamics shape not only preferences, beliefs, and motivations, but also political-strategic opportunities.

While our goal is primarily programmatic, we offer an illustrative application of our amendments as a means to coherently order the multitude of responses to 11 September 2001 (9/11) attacks. We posit that the attacks generated an affective wave whose effects can be found in the reactions, choices, political opportunities and strategies observable in their immediate aftermath, as well as more long-term shifts in the political environment.

Before embarking, a word to definitions. We use the term “affective dynamics” to denote the range of ways embodied mental processes and the felt dimensions of human experience influence thought and behavior. When affective dynamics enter consciousness we recognize them as feelings, but they may also operate as biases at levels of intensity below conscious awareness.² While some treat affect and emotion as interchangeable, we reserve the term “emotion” for socially recognized, structured episodes of affectively valenced response, such as “anger,” “pride,” or “fear.” Emotions, in this definition, constitute a subcategory of patterned affective reactions. We reserve “preferences”—long the purview of rationalist choice approaches—for consciously known wants pertaining to specific outcomes.

Affective Dynamics and Actorhood

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Strong affective reactions can upset the trajectory of our thoughts and behavior. Outrage, terror, panic, euphoria—these are extreme responses that can derail prior plans, monopolize attention, and make it seem as if we are beside ourselves. Such *high-intensity affective experiences* deluge us with feeling, as not only our physical state but also our very goals rapidly shift. Strong anger responses, for example, do not just produce physiological and expressive reactions such as glaring, muscle-tension, and fist clenching; they forcefully spur us to aggressively address a perceived offence. Likewise, intense fear does not just beget an increased heart rate and trembling; it generates an immediate and overwhelming drive to mitigate or escape a perceived threat.³

Indeed, high-intensity affective reactions are significant for their ability to temporarily hijack an actor’s thoughts, desires, attention, and energies in response to situational factors. As Griffith explains, such “irruptive motivations” are “not derived from standing general goals by means-ends reasoning. They occur in response to certain immediate circumstances... they frequently disrupt longer-term plans.”⁴ Policymakers are not

² Damasio 2010, 174-75.

³ Lazarus 1991, 217-33; Ortony et al., 148; Lazarus 1991, 236.

⁴ Griffiths 1997, 243.

immune to these effects; for instance, Mercer argues strong emotional responses—amplified by surprise—played a key role in changing U.S. intentions and plans in favor of protecting South Korea at the outbreak of the Korean War.⁵

On the surface, this disruptive nature may appear maladaptive. Evolutionary psychologists suggest, however, that we are endowed with certain affective programs—“inherited behavior potentials”—because they better prepared our ancestors to respond to threats to their survival by grabbing attention with affective alarms and automatically and instantaneously marshaling their physiological and cognitive resources.⁶ Others, such as economist Robert Frank, have further claimed that emotional responses also helped our species to deal with commitment problems and thus promote cooperation. Anger, for example, works as a commitment to incur the costs of punishing another and thus can mitigate defection.⁷

Regardless what their possible evolutionary roles, high-intensity responses generally signal to us the impact of situational variables on a concern important to us—our physical safety, dignity, values—and prepare us to react accordingly.⁸ The assessments that our concerns are involved need not be conscious,⁹ but the affective responses such assessments activate frequently enter—if not commandeer—conscious awareness. By doing so, they can temporarily thrust other concerns into the background—overturning an actor’s conscious hierarchy of preferences—and even drive us to behavior we would not ordinarily display (e.g. road rage). In fact, because high-intensity responses are typically episodic and temporary in nature, an actor may subsequently regret actions taken under their influence after said influence subsides.

High intensity responses also color the process of decision-making. As Elster describes, they play a “dual role,” altering both “the reward parameters for rational choice” and “the ability to make rational choices within those parameters.”¹⁰ Apart from reordering

⁵ Mercer 2013.

⁶ Panksepp and Biven 2012, 42-44.

⁷ Frank 1988.

⁸ Frijda 1988, 351.

⁹ LeDoux 1996; Öhman and Weins 2004; Zajonc 1980; Zajonc 1994, 293-97.

¹⁰ Elster 1999, 165.

preferences, high-intensity affective responses can drastically alter feelings of urgency, reorient attentional focus, and affect information processing.¹¹ Affective responses also facilitate the recollection of memories formed in like emotional states.¹² In this manner, actors may perceive linkages across past and present events due to *affective connections*—similarity in their associated feelings—and not objectively shared characteristics. To wit, actors experiencing outrage may suddenly find their attention dominated by the perceived source of provocation, experience memories of similar events flooding their mind, feel overwhelmingly motivated to lash out, and thus drastically discount the future consequences or normative implications of their behavior.

What is more, high-intensity responses can produce *spillover effects*, whereby felt reactions generated by one event or object color behavior towards unrelated stimuli by virtue of superficial resemblance, the timing of exposure, or the latter's ability to answer affective needs generated by the former.¹³ For example, anger during one's commute might bleed into the treatment of co-workers at a morning meeting. Or compassion elicited by a natural disaster might carry over into diplomatic negotiations. Some accounts even suggest the mobility of diffuse affective "excitations" not specifically tied to any one type of emotion.¹⁴ As such affective excitations transfer from one object to another, their emotional manifestations may also change form: feelings of fear towards a stronger party, for instance, might transmute into expressions of anger at a weaker one. Spillover occurs despite the lack of cognitive connection between its initial source and subsequent target, and yet it carries the potential of shaping preferences, perceptions, and action.

High-intensity affective responses and their effects currently exist outside the scope of mainstream understandings of actorhood—at best appearing as exogenous phantasms that intrude upon the normal operations of decision-making and choice. In most rationalist models, preferences are treated as constant for the duration of an interaction.¹⁵ Constructivists allow for changes in identities and norms, but primarily through gradual

¹¹ McDermott 2004; Crawford 2000, 137-45.

¹² Bower and Cohen 2014.

¹³ Lerner and Keltner 2000, 473-93.

¹⁴ Murphy and Zajonc 1993, 723-39; Zillmann 1996.

¹⁵ Frieden 1999, 42. Morrow 1994, 19.

processes of socialization.¹⁶ Neither approach currently captures and accounts for all the effects that these sudden, yet temporary, affective upheavals can have on preferences, judgment, and behavior.

But affective processes do not always take such conspicuous forms. Feeling and affect play a role in our judgments and behavior even when they do not manifest themselves as high-intensity responses. Namely, affective experience also comes in *low-intensity* varieties, as “gut feelings,” felt twinges, and even processes active at levels below conscious awareness. In fact, without such lower intensity forms of affective experience, we would find even the simplest of decisions quite difficult.

Consider the oft-cited case of a man called “Elliot” who had suffered brain damage in a manner that reduced his ability to feel emotion. Although Elliot was perfectly able to lay out options, assess their consequences, understand their implications, he was unable to choose among them. Damasio, the neuroscientist who examined Elliot, writes: “Elliot’s reasoning prevented him from assigning different values to different options, and made his decision-making landscape hopelessly flat.”¹⁷ Without access to affect, Elliot had no impetus to choice or action. How we feel is integral to our knowing what we want and how much we want it. As Frijda, argues, “cognitive reasoning may argue that a particular event could lead to loss of money or health or life, but so what? What is wrong with death, other than it is disliked?”¹⁸ Lacking affective experience, we lose the basis for determining what it is we want in the first place.¹⁹

Affective dynamics not only supply the felt basis for preferences but also contribute to the real world functioning of many mechanisms cited by constructivists. Consider the “shame” at work in social influence, the “we feeling” of security communities, the “outrage” invoked by taboo violation, or the “anxiety” of ontological insecurity—all reference dynamics laden with affect.²⁰ The affective dimension of these mechanisms is

¹⁶ Johnston 2008.

¹⁷ Damasio 1994, 51.

¹⁸ Frijda 1994, 200.

¹⁹ McDermott; Mercer 2005.

²⁰ Johnston 2008, 79-88; Adler and Barnett 1998, 8.; Tannenwald 1999, 453, 56; Mitzen 2006, 346. For emotions and ontological security, see: Steele 2008.

not redundant, but plays a crucial role.²¹ Strip normative concerns of their affective component and one is left with a psychopathic actor. As Haidt explains, “psychopaths show a general poverty of affective reactions, particularly those that would be triggered by the suffering of others (remorse, sympathy), condemnation by others (shame, embarrassment), or attachment to others (love, grief).” Psychopaths are quite aware of what constitutes normatively correct behavior, but, as Haidt notes, “they simply do not care.”²² Affective dynamics motivate adherence—even attention—to the most basic of norms.

In short, key rationalist and constructivist concepts lose their real world potency absent affective motors. For our preferences, low-intensity affective responses provide the feelings—missing in the example given of Elliot above—that inform our wants. For norms, they can supply a feeling of “correctness” that drives claims of right or wrong, at times even in the absence of an ability to articulate a specific moral logic.²³ Outrage, fear, and other high-intensity responses may upend our thoughts and actions, but without affective dynamics operating at lower intensities we would find life quite difficult to navigate. Low-intensity affective responses guide us by instilling our perceptions, attitudes, and thoughts with the subjective valences we associate with other actors, objects, or situations.²⁴ But crucially, even these more subtle affective reactions entail effects that deviate from the expectations of existing approaches.

Consider the impact of feelings on judgments. To form judgments, human beings rely upon not only external information but also subjectively felt reactions experienced as “intuition” or “gut feelings.” Hall and Yarhi-Milo argue, for instance, that low-intensity affective responses alter the way leaders judge the sincerity of their counterparts—in some cases having a larger effect than hard evidence.²⁵ Alternately, examining diplomacy during the 1905-1906 Moroccan Crisis, Kaufmann posits that the felt salience of

²¹ Beer et al. 2003.

²² Haidt 2001, 824.

²³ Haidt 2001.

²⁴ Ortony et al. 1988.

²⁵ Hall and Yahri-Mio 2012.

personally delivered information gave it a greater impact.²⁶ And felt reactions can also shape an actor's judgments as to the accuracy of reasoned argumentation.²⁷ As Mercer suggests when discussing the difficulty of persuading terrorists, "Passionate actors defeat attempts at persuasion not only with their selection and interpretation of evidence, but also with the certainty that comes with passion."²⁸ All suggest a role for low-intensity, affective factors presently outside the purview of rationalist and constructivist theorizing.

Or take the experience of risk. Prospect theory argues tolerance for risk shifts depending on whether the same outcomes are framed in terms of losses or gains; this claim has been at the root of much work challenging rationalist approaches in IR.²⁹ Recent research, however, points to the importance of affective reactions—not just high-intensity terror responses, but subtle, low-intensity feelings of fear evoked by possible losses—as responsible for not only the findings of prospect theory but also the human experience of risk itself.³⁰ It is one thing to cognitively understand the probability of an undesirable outcome, quite another to feel it. As one set of researchers put it, when emotions and cognitive beliefs concerning risks diverge, the "emotional reactions often drive behavior."³¹ The affective reaction to an imagined outcome, such as a terrorist attack—as opposed to the Bayesian updating concerning actual consequences or statistical likelihood—can thus have an outsized influence on decision-making.³² Affective responses can even generate "probability neglect," whereby actors focus on an outcome due to its affective salience and thereby become "inattentive to the fact that it is unlikely to occur."³³

The affective dynamics outlined here not only depart from the expectations of dominant models but also signal the existence of a distinctively *felt* influence on—even basis for—belief and judgment irreducible to and sometimes even at odds with cognitive knowledge.

²⁶ Kaufmann 1994.

²⁷ Crawford, 149-50.

²⁸ Mercer 2010, 25.

²⁹ McDermott 1998; Levy 2002.

³⁰ Kahneman 2011, 363-74; Loewenstein et al. 2001; Slovic et al. 2004.

³¹ Loewenstein et al., 267.

³² Slovic et al., 317; Kahneman, 326-27.

³³ Sunstein 2003, 122.

As two psychologists note, “interventions attempting to change feelings by encouraging [an individual] to ‘know better’ or ‘know more’ many not always work in the long run, because ‘feeling it’... refers to a *qualitatively* distinct meaning level.”³⁴

Low-intensity affective processes work in further ways neither rationalist nor constructivist approaches are currently equipped to assess. Moods—such as optimism, general apprehension, or detached melancholy—can influence perceptions, judgments, and motivations even absent awareness of their effects. For instance, individuals in depressed moods are more likely to be risk-acceptant, recall negative memories, and want to avoid interaction with others.³⁵ Affective dynamics may even nudge our choices and steer our attention in the form of biases we do not consciously register as feelings. Valenced low-intensity affective process can color perceptions of completely unconnected objects, even when active only below the level of conscious awareness.³⁶ Low-intensity affective processes—whether global moods or specific reactions—can therefore also have spillover effects.

Disaggregating affective dynamics in this manner helps order existing work on emotions and affect within IR. Granted, we draw a stark distinction between high- and low-intensity affective experience for heuristic purposes, artificially dichotomizing what in reality is a continuum ranging from extreme emotional reactions to processes operating at levels below conscious awareness. But this distinction helps conceptually organize a disparate body of work. Existing research on topics such as severe emotional stress during crises³⁷ and specific strong emotional reactions felt by leaders³⁸ address the effects of high-intensity affective responses. Conversely, work on emotional salience and motivated biases,³⁹ behavior towards risk,⁴⁰ even the intersection between emotion and rationality⁴¹ constitute contributions to explicating the role of lower intensity affective dynamics.

³⁴ Samoilov and Goldfried 2000.

³⁵ See Kliger and Levy 2003; Lewis et al. 2005; Gendolla 2000.

³⁶ Zajonc 2000, 54.

³⁷ Lebow 1981; Holsti 1989.

³⁸ Saurette 2006; Hymans 2006; Blight 1990; Löwenheim and Heimann 2008.

³⁹ Kaufmann.

⁴⁰ McDermott.

And to be clear, nothing here implies a blanket normative assessment of any one type of affective response. High-intensity affective responses may be disruptive, but under certain circumstances such disruptions may be life saving. Low-intensity affective processes may provide the sense of value necessary for adjudicating preferences and normative positions, but these also can bias judgment and stubbornly defy cognitive assessments to their contrary. In different ways, both constitute sources of variation in actors' judgments and behavior that rationalist and constructivist approaches have yet to assimilate adequately.

SOURCES OF AFFECTIVE RESPONSE AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Parsing the variety of affective experience helps provide conceptual order, but leaves unanswered the question of what triggers affective responses, either high or low intensity. Although affective reactions can vary wildly—within and across individuals—the activation of affective dynamics is not random.

For one, affective responses can result from perceptions that situational factors are impacting upon significant concerns. *Concerns* are what we care about—objects, values, and goals that will, when meaningfully implicated in a situation, elicit emotions. Unlike preferences in rationalist accounts, concerns constitute loci of affective investment. To illustrate, one's family or nation may be a concern—and as such a possible object of preferences, but not a preference itself. And depending on the situation, concerns may evoke any variety of different emotions.⁴² A concern for one's family can generate either joy (when reunited) or fear (when threatened). But in the absence of emotion-inducing circumstances, concerns may exist within us without attracting our attention. And the hierarchy of concerns is not inviolable: if a deeply-held concern engenders a high-intensity response, the salience of other concerns may suddenly fade.

Affective responses can also be triggered by an actor's *affective dispositions*—latent propensities to particular affective responses given exposure to certain stimuli. Whereas concerns implicate a variety of different emotional reactions, dispositions are linked to

⁴¹ Mercer; McDermott.

⁴² Frijda, 351.

specific, stimuli-oriented responses.⁴³ For example, one can have the disposition of extreme dislike, even hatred towards something: Churchill reportedly had such a visceral disposition towards Communism.⁴⁴ As Frijda notes, “being frightened by a dog and being afraid of dogs is not the same thing. The distinction corresponds with that between occurrent states [affective responses] and inclinations or dispositions.”⁴⁵ And yet, the content of an actor’s dispositions greatly influences the circumstances under which an affective response will occur. The disposition of being afraid of dogs may generate low-intensity reactions, such as an aversive cringe, or stronger emotions, such as outright terror. These affective dispositions are distinct from, and may conflict with, cognitive beliefs: for instance, an actor may regard a certain aversion as wrong or silly and yet be unable to overcome it. There is some evidence that racial and other cultural biases can operate in this fashion; even individuals who consciously deny racial prejudices respond to racially marked images in a different, less sympathetic manner.⁴⁶ And while we can seek to ameliorate their effects, such dispositions are not as easily amenable to conscious updating as beliefs described in cognitivist approaches.

Importantly, affective dispositions and concerns are durable but not static, and shift in response to prior and ongoing affective experience.⁴⁷ They reflect the embodied memory of previously felt reactions to specific objects, actors, or circumstances. Such dispositions and concerns may also accrue imperceptibly through repeated low-intensity reactions and experiences. Psychologists have long noted the “exposure effect” by which the affective effects of benign exposure increase an individual’s preference for an object without even being cognizant of having previously encountered it.⁴⁸ Conversely, extended exposure to a pool of negative associations—for example through entertainment and news media—may cultivate aversive dispositions, including subtle racial and cultural biases. That said, a single high-intensity emotional reaction is also capable of searing into an individual a durable affective inclination. For instance, one terrifying experience with a dog may

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Costigliola 2012, 52.

⁴⁵ Frijda 2000, 64.

⁴⁶ Phelps and Thomas 2003, 747-53.

⁴⁷ Damasio, 165-201.

⁴⁸ Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc 1980.

leave a person with a perpetual fear of all canines.⁴⁹ Both pathways carry significance for IR, whether in terms of the seeding of national sentiments through long-term exposure to national symbols, or in the form of affective scars borne of intense reactions to events such as war or ethnic conflict.

A further source of affective stimulation is *mirroring*. Far from being purely internal, affective states find outward manifestation in the form of corresponding expressive displays, such as the flushed face of shame or the furrowed brow and clenched fist of anger.⁵⁰ These displays can, in turn, influence the affective experience of those exposed to them. Specifically, when people observe emotional expressions in others, their brains initiate the neural and bodily responses associated with the observed emotions. The result is a complex process of trans-personal simulation in which we accumulate through experience neural and visceral changes that become the basis for affective states and responses. Through these processes of mirroring, we not only receive the emotions of others but emulate and transmit them in turn.⁵¹

The above is not an exhaustive list; actors, for example, may also experience affective changes endogenously, as a result of rumination or biochemical fluctuations. But these three sources—concerns, dispositions, and mirroring—are of greatest interest for scholars of international relations for they constitute key points of contact where observable situational variables can trigger affective experience.

⁴⁹ LeDoux, 203.

⁵⁰ Indeed, such expressions may be completely lacking an explicit goal orientation. For a discussion of the relationship between expression, emotion, and goal orientation, see: Döring 2003, 214-30.

⁵¹ “Mirror neurons” located in the ventromedial cortex facilitate this process of emulation. See, e.g., Iacoboni 2008; Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2008. For further discussion in IR, see: Ross 2014.

**AMENDMENTS TO UNDERSTANDINGS OF ACTORHOOD
AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

- 1) Individuals generally possess the capacity for reason, reflection, and strategic and normatively guided behavior, but these capacities are largely unmotivated and directionless absent affective dynamics.
- 2) At low levels of intensity, affective dynamics inform the preferences and normative appraisals described in rationalist and constructivist accounts, but they also can entail subtle, yet significant effects on judgment and perception outside the expectations of such approaches (e.g. the influence of feelings on perceptions of risk or mood on judgment).
- 3) High-intensity affective reactions, although generally limited temporally, are capable of drastically reorienting attention, priorities, and behavior, even spilling over onto unrelated situations or objects.
- 4) Affective experience in most (but not all) cases is a function of perceived external stimuli intersecting with specific pre-existing affective dispositions or concerns.
- 5) Affective reactions and experiences can reshape pre-existing affective dispositions and concerns, even without an actor's awareness.
- 6) Individuals are endowed with both an expressive repertoire for conveying internal affective experience and the ability to subjectively mirror the affective states of others.

THE CHALLENGE OF COLLECTIVE DYNAMICS

Much of what interests IR scholars, however, occurs at the level of the state and other corporate actors, where theorizing affective experience constitutes a significant challenge. Rationalist and mainstream constructivist approaches face little difficulty speaking to this level because they conceptualize states as sites of preferences, identities, or other similarly disembodied abstractions. As Alexander Wendt notes, "IR is overwhelming cognitivist in

its view of states.”⁵² Some accounts emphasize that states consist of affect-capable individuals: as Jacques Hymans writes, “states are not gigantic calculating machines; they are hierarchically organized groups of emotional people.”⁵³ But even such views still encounter the hurdle of the “multi-body” problem when attempting to scale up to the collective level—how can an embodied phenomenon such as affective experience have a collective dimension? Consequently, while IR scholars have been willing to accept beliefs, volitions, and even values and identities as attributes of collectives, ascribing affect and emotions to anything but individuals has for many remained a bridge too far.⁵⁴

There is a way to avoid the problems plaguing efforts to transpose individual-level theories of affect and emotion onto collective actors: theorize how collective affective experience can emerge from the interaction of properties at the individual level. In other words, rather than looking for ways to apply theories of individual-level processes to the group level, we can theorize how elements initially conceptualized at the individual level—dispositions, concerns, mirroring—also permit affective experience of high and low intensity to be shared across actors and thereby to assume a collective dimension. Collective affective experience thus occupies a different ontological category, being an emergent property of interacting individual-level processes. We identify three pathways to collective affective experience: bottom-up, horizontal, and top-down.

First, by virtue sharing key dispositions or concerns, individuals may experience a consonant affective reaction in a *bottom-up* fashion. Indeed, IR scholars have already suggested such processes are at play when concerns related to pre-existing group identities form the basis of common emotional responses. Such an approach addresses the “multi-body” problem by focusing on the “group within the individual.”⁵⁵ Sasley, drawing on intergroup emotions theory, postulates that “the group becomes part of the individual, who then reacts not as that individual but as a member of the group, and individual members of the group converge on the same emotions, so that we can speak of a ‘single’

⁵² Wendt 2004, 312.

⁵³ Hymans 2010, 462.

⁵⁴ Wendt, 312-13.

⁵⁵ Löwenheim and Heimann; Mercer 2006; Sasley 2011.

prototypical emotion.”⁵⁶ The nation-state offers an especially important magnet for concern, and due to such shared concern individuals may respond with similar emotions to the losses, achievements, or insults that befall their polity. But alternative sites of affective investment also exist, including religious groups, ethnic groups, nations, or even normative and epistemic communities. Moreover, even absent group ties, dispositions and concerns—such as specific values, attachments, or desires—can be homologous across individuals and thus capable of eliciting shared affective responses. Consequently, the affective consequences of how a situation impacts on particular concerns may determine which shared identities or allegiances come to the fore.

While such a solution provides the important possibility for spontaneous affective consonance among individuals, it omits mechanisms of *horizontal affective transmission* that belie the notion of an interpersonal divide. Individuals may not only share similar affective experience because of common dispositions or concerns, but also their affective experiences themselves may afford processes of contagion.⁵⁷ Horizontal transmission occurs when affective displays, symbols, and discourses circulate across actors to generate affective responses.

These social effects are rooted in attributes already accorded to individuals. As noted above, humans have the capacity to both outwardly express affective reactions and internally mirror those of others. Through mirroring in the context of social interactions, we can thus come to share in affective experience. Not only bodily expressions, but also symbolic displays, emotional discourse, and selected imagery can facilitate the transmission of affective states. Engaging in protest activities, for example, can expose people to shared emotional stimuli and the expressive displays of other participants, both of which can generate patterns of affective response.⁵⁸ Media communications can have similar effects, exposing dispersed audiences to a common stock of affect-inducing events, symbols, and narratives. While microsociologists have typically privileged face-to-face interactions as emotionally significant, communications technologies are giving rise to

⁵⁶ Sasley, 454.

⁵⁷ Stein 2013, 208.

⁵⁸ Collins 2004.

increasingly powerful channels of dispersed affective elicitation.⁵⁹ From diplomacy and deliberation to protest and the use of violence, many of the embodied social practices embedded within the phenomena studied in IR contain the potential to engender politically significant, collective-level affective responses.⁶⁰

Social forces can also harmonize—even discipline—affective reactions in a *top-down* fashion into conformity with others. These processes can occur through the diffuse influence of broadly held expectations and norms. Within international relations, for instance, feminist work has long pointed to the ways in which military masculinities cultivate particular emotional norms.⁶¹ Although actors never have complete control over their own affective reactions and experience, they can nevertheless seek to suppress certain responses and project others. There exist multiple strategies for regulating emotional response, ranging from shifting one’s attention away from the eliciting stimulus to talking oneself into a particular affective state by reframing one’s assessment of how a situation impacts on concerns.⁶² Indeed, the threat of feeling of guilt or shame should norms of emotional display be violated can be a potent motivator for such self-discipline. And while acting out an emotion is not the same as spontaneously experiencing it, psychologists have demonstrated that performing particular emotions can actually generate corresponding feelings.⁶³ In this manner, affective experience may be brought more closely into alignment with shared social expectations, thus generating similar patterns of observed response.

Top-down harmonization may also work in more situationally specific ways by enveloping actors in discourses and practices that privilege certain affective expressions. In times of crisis, for example, specific patterns of emotional response may be imbued with cultural legitimacy and political acceptance. For example, Emma Hutchinson argues that, in response to the 2002 Bali bombing, Australian political figures and media sought to “align individual emotions with the wider emotionally charged social discourses

⁵⁹ Castells 2009.

⁶⁰ Bially Mattern 2011.

⁶¹ Cohn 1987.

⁶² Gross 1998.

⁶³ Ekman 2003.

that ultimately narrated and gave meaning to the catastrophe.”⁶⁴ Social discourses of emotion, affectively laden public expression, and practices of narration can work to enhance particular affective responses while discouraging others—or depoliticizing them as belonging to the personal realm. For example, German enthusiasm for war in 1914 was much less widespread than previously assumed, and the “myth” of its prevalence resulted from representations within the conservative nationalist press.⁶⁵ Such representations both encouraged further displays of enthusiasm and sidelined other affective reactions—such as the fear and sadness of family members as loved ones were sent to war—as private and lacking political import. As Crawford argues, such dynamics can become institutionalized over time, as they are “written on the body politic, with political consequences.”⁶⁶

These three pathways—*bottom-up*, *horizontal*, and *top-down*—form the basis for emergent dynamics at the collective level. Such pathways do not work in isolation, and when in agreement can produce amplifying feedback effects, creating the possibility of *affective waves* across a population. Precisely, an event that elicits similar strong emotions across individuals, for example, may produce spontaneous public expression, in turn facilitating transmission, social articulation, and further intensification. The resultant environment, in turn, exerts further social pressure on actors to engage in shared affective displays and practices, and thus harmonize their own affective experience. The product is a collective, high-intensity affective response capable of overriding pre-existing goals and concerns. High-intensity affective responses are difficult to sustain over time, however, and thus subside absent further stimulation. Consequently, these waves generally will crest—creating windows of political opportunity—and then dissipate. But the political atmosphere will not fully regress to its original baseline, for as the wave loses intensity it will leave altered dispositions and concerns in its wake. This dynamic would help explain the pattern of euphoria that created new possibilities at the end of the Cold War, or of fear and anger after 9/11.

⁶⁴ Hutchison 2010, 74.

⁶⁵ Verhey 2000.

⁶⁶ Crawford 2009, 279.

A second dynamic is *emergent collective solidarities*. Whereas social identity theories tend to begin with familiar social groups and then ask how and why members of that group may come to share certain emotional responses, the above suggests shared affective experience can occur due to bottom-up or horizontal processes not directly shaped by pre-existing identities. Alongside the emotions people feel toward, for example, their state or religious community, they may experience transmissions of affect connecting them to co-participants in social protest movements or media communications transcending national allegiances. For while we are unlikely to find pre-existing social groups the members of which all possess exactly the same pattern of affective response, we may well find emergent constellations of affective expression temporarily giving rise to politically relevant solidarities and social entities. Put succinctly, instead of pre-existing groups generating shared affect, we should look to shared affective experience as generating the motives and affinities that constitute new groupings. Therefore the common affective bases of transnational human rights groups or terrorist organizations may be not a product of collective actorhood but its catalyst, fuel, and glue.

Thus, collective affective experience does exist, but not owing to analytical efforts at scaling up from individual to group level. Rather, it exists by virtue of how individual-level properties and social constellations interact to create pathways (bottom-up, horizontal, top-down) through which such shared experience is generated. These pathways, in turn, form the conditions of possibility for collective dynamics not outlined in existing theories. Affective waves involve a cresting and dissipation of motivation, attention, and urgency not fully correlated with the variables shaping behavior in rationalist or constructivist approaches. Emergent collective solidarities require suspending fidelity to familiar units of analysis in order to assess how affective responses can give rise to new identifications. And together, these collective dynamics shape the environment political actors must navigate, providing opportunities, constraints, and pressures on their behavior.

AFFECTIVE POLITICS

The affective dynamics outlined above—individual and collective—not only influence how actors perceive and behave but also form part of the strategic context actors confront when seeking to pursue particular goals. As Mercer has observed, strategy requires understanding how emotion can shape actors' thoughts and behavior.⁶⁷ We suggest in particular four forms of strategic political behavior that exist by virtue of our proposed amendments and their collective implications: calibration, manipulation, cultivation, and display.

Calibration occurs when actors craft their own political behavior with an eye towards the possible affective state of others, individuals or groups. As outlined above, the attention, goals, and receptivity of actors fluctuate with their affective state; calibration works to match strategies to a target's affective status. Variance in affective states can create windows wherein certain approaches may be more propitious than others. In July 1914, for instance, the Austro-Hungarian government deliberately approached the German Kaiser when his emotional state seemed most conducive to receiving support: its representative was advised to meet him “in the current moment while he is still appalled by the bloody deed in Sarajevo, [so he] will give us every assurance and stay the course up to war.”⁶⁸ Calibration may also involve avoiding certain approaches when affective conditions are unfavorable, as when West Germany chose not to push for diplomatic relations with Israel in the early 1950s because it saw the aftermath of the Holocaust as still too raw.⁶⁹ Calibration incorporates the affect of others—including its temporal vicissitudes—as a strategic parameter.

Manipulation, in contrast, seeks to intentionally elicit a high-intensity affective response by playing upon existing dispositions and concerns to influence decision-making and behavior. This strategy aims to harness for political purposes the potential of high-intensity affective responses to center attention, override competing concerns, and motivate action. For example, leaders may seek to manipulate public affective responses

⁶⁷ Mercer 2013.

⁶⁸ Angelow 2000, 445.

⁶⁹ Vogel 1967, 98.

to gain support for desired policies, such as mobilizing by “fear mongering” or manipulating information.⁷⁰ Alternately, state actors may set their sights on the constituents of counterparts. Bismarck, for example, famously doctored a telegram to appear as if the French ambassador to Germany had been insulted in order to incite outrage in France—a “red rag to the Gallic bull”—and instigate war.⁷¹ Manipulation may be practiced by all variety of actors—terrorists aiming to provoke, humanitarian NGOs hoping to induce compassion, or diplomats seeking advantage in negotiations.⁷² It can be aimed at individuals or seek to set off collective-level responses, even affective waves. Whichever form it takes, manipulation works by rendering issues, situations, or actors in a manner geared to elicit a particular affective reaction; its success greatly hinges on its ability to activate pre-existing dispositions or invoke or threaten concerns. Manipulation need not be cynical; the manipulating party may share the feelings it endeavors to evoke in others.

Cultivation, alternatively, aims to alter the underlying structure of affective dispositions and concerns within a target actor or group. Its objective is to instill lasting fears, hatreds, sympathies, affections, or loyalties. Affective dispositions and concerns—within individuals and across societies—can constitute resources for emotional mobilization as well as barriers and sources of political constraint. Absent major shocks, such dispositions change only gradually. Scholarship on nation-building points to the importance of cultivating affective connections with particular symbols and values.⁷³ By inculcating citizens through myriad pathways—education, national ritual, propaganda—with love for their state, the state cultivates a citizenry that can be called upon with emotional appeals for fidelity and self-sacrifice. Although most obvious in state-citizen relations, cultivation is also a tool available to states vis-à-vis the populations of their counterparts (e.g. soft power campaigns), or even non-state actors (e.g. radical madrasas). Cultivation is a long-term strategy seeking to transform the affective landscape for political ends, molding future individual and collective bottom-up responses. In contradistinction to

⁷⁰ Mearsheimer 2011.

⁷¹ Wetzel 2003, 158.

⁷² Kydd and Walter 2006; Busby 2007; Solomon 1995., x

⁷³ Dekker et al. 2003, 351.

constructivist accounts of socialization, cultivation works to embed propensities towards feelings, not just notions of appropriateness or habits.

Lastly, *display* is the strategy of outwardly projecting the image of an emotional reaction or affective disposition to influence a target. As noted in our amendments, actors are endowed with an expressive repertoire for conveying their internal states. As actors realize that the expression of emotions or affect conveys meaning about beliefs, values, or likely future actions, they can also perform such displays for strategic purposes. Hitler was reportedly a master of such behavior: one account tells of his demanding time to work himself into a rage before meeting a foreign dignitary.⁷⁴ This strategy is not limited to the individual level. Hall argues Chinese officials have at times collectively performed a “diplomacy of anger” in order to constitute the issue of Taiwan as sensitive and volatile.⁷⁵ Actors engaging in such displays may be feigning affect, may have “worked themselves up” into feeling something, or may be entirely sincere. What is important is that they see strategic value in visibly displaying emotion—either to shape perceptions or provoke emotions in others.

Although these four types of strategic behavior capture some core elements of affectively-oriented political activities, we do not propose them to be exhaustive. Whether latent affective dispositions or high-intensity responses, affective elements form an integral part of the political landscape strategic actors navigate. Not simply a backdrop for or motor of political behavior, these affective dynamics may themselves be targets for strategic intervention.

In sum, our amendments to existing understandings of actorhood incorporate heretofore overlooked phenomena at the individual level—such as shifts in motivation and attention—as well as form the basis for pathways to collective affective experience and emergent collective dynamics. And together, the individual and collective dimensions of affective experience supply opportunities and constraints within the political realm, creating the conditions of possibility for affectively-oriented strategies. Affective dynamics not only influence the decisions and behaviors of decision-makers but also structure the

⁷⁴ Irving 1978, 120.

⁷⁵ Hall 2011.

larger social and political context these actors creatively engage. By thus amending our understandings of actorhood to include affective experience, it becomes possible to make sense of processes at work across a disparate range of international political developments. To illustrate, we turn to the impact of the 9/11 attacks.

Affect, Affective Politics, and 9/11

9/11 was an emotionally salient event that generated an affective shock wave. Its initial points of impact were the myriad affective responses of individuals—elite and mass, in the United States and across the globe—who watched as events unfolded in real-time. But these individual responses quickly assumed collective dimensions as they found expression in and were amplified through social interactions, public displays, and the media. The consequences of this wave were multiple: in the United States, shifting concerns opened political windows for new policies, and affective reactions spilled over onto targets such as Iraq; internationally, collective identifications spontaneously emerged across disparate actors to generate support; and, both domestically and globally, policymakers reoriented political strategies to capitalize on the new affective environment. While this wave of high-intensity responses would subside, its affective consequences would persist in the form of lower-intensity feelings and moods, reordered concerns, and new or intensified dispositions.

Empirically, this account can be evaluated not just in terms of its ability to make sense of a diverse range of political outcomes, but also by the presence or absence of corroborating evidence left in the form of self-reports, public discourse and displays, and the observations of contemporaries. This approach is not substantively different from that employed by research on preferences, norms, and identities—entities whose existence can only be posited by examining their observable implications. Indeed, the expressive correlates of affective experience are among the behavioral manifestations that make such seemingly unobservable phenomena visible.⁷⁶

By viewing 9/11 as the source of an affective wave with corollary consequences, we offer a new means of understanding the impact this signal event had. The various pieces of

⁷⁶ Thanks to Jonathan Mercer for pointing this out.

data we assemble are not in themselves novel, and we draw readily upon extant research in the areas of public opinion, policy, and domestic and international political behavior. Until now, however, this work has approached the affective dimensions of 9/11 in a piecemeal fashion, extracting singular aspects of a multi-dimensional affective event—and static elements of an on-going process—without considering larger interconnections and implications. We offer a way to integrate seemingly disparate outcomes into a theoretically coherent account in which they constitute complementary and interlocking elements of a larger picture.

9/11 PRODUCED AN AFFECTIVE WAVE

In the United States, the 9/11 attacks triggered a range of high-intensity affective responses. Fear was the most commonly reported: In the months following the attacks, polls indicated that more than half of Americans felt 9/11 had “shaken [their] own sense of personal safety and security” either “some” or a “great deal.” Nearly half reported feeling anxious and worried “very often” or “sometimes,” and more than 30% said the same for feeling scared and frightened.⁷⁷ But the attacks also produced sadness, with one poll reporting that 9/11 had “affected Americans emotionally... Seven out of ten Americans, including almost six out of ten men, say that they have cried.”⁷⁸ And the attacks also correlated with an increase in self-reported “aggression, anger, and hostility.”⁷⁹ In the month directly after 9/11, almost a third of Americans reported often feeling anger.⁸⁰ Fear, sadness, and anger were not uniform responses, but they were widely shared—not just across residents of New York and Washington, but also more broadly.⁸¹

Policymakers reported comparable high-intensity affective responses. U.S. President George Bush recalls: “My first reaction was outrage... My blood was boiling. We were

⁷⁷ Huddy et al. 2005, 597.

⁷⁸ “Attack on America,” *Gallup News Service*, 17 September 2001, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/4906/Attack-America-Review-Public-Opinion.aspx>, accessed 3 April 2013.

⁷⁹ Carnagey and Anderson 2007.

⁸⁰ Greenberg et al. 2004.

⁸¹ On the geographic distribution of fear and anxiety after the attacks, see Silver et al. 2002, 1235.

going to find out who did this and kick their ass.”⁸² In addition to anger, Bush recounts feeling the “agony and despair” of those who jumped to their deaths from the twin towers: “I had the most powerful job in the world, yet I felt powerless to help them.” In his memoirs, Bush also relates choking up at various times following 9/11, and both Rumsfeld and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice corroborate his self-reports.⁸³ Indeed, Rice and Rumsfeld report having similar reactions themselves: the former admits to being “shaken to [her] core” and in “a virtual state of shock for two days after 9/11,” and the latter spoke of “haunting” memories, “impossible to get out of [his] mind.”⁸⁴ CIA Director George Tenet, in contrast, recounts that the emotional impact hit him afterwards: “I missed my own emotional buildup... [some time later] I went out in front of our house, sat down in my favorite Adirondack chair, and just lost it.”⁸⁵ Even recognizing that these reports may pander to public expectations, we would have to ascribe psychopathic traits to Bush Administration officials to argue that the attacks had no affective impact on them.

Because poll data and post-hoc self-reports provide only isolated snapshots of discrete emotions, however, they cannot offer a full picture of the ways in which affective responses assumed more collective dimensions. For one, subjective reports tend to abstract personal emotion from the public concerns giving rise to them. Affective responses were widely shared in part because they were the synthetic product of both a triggering event and a constellation of deep concerns—family, friends, and nation—held in common by many Americans.

Moreover, these bottom-up reactions became intertwined with horizontal processes of diffusion. For example, reports suggest that a large majority of Americans reported displaying the American flag on their person, car, or home.⁸⁶ The public deployment of national symbols thus helped to direct affective reactions toward certain forms of solidarity. By saturating the social environment with symbols linked to pre-existing and

⁸² Bush 2010, 127.

⁸³ Bush 2010, 131; Rumsfeld 2011, 351; Rice 2011, 82.

⁸⁴ Rice 2011, 72, 82; Rumsfeld, 351.

⁸⁵ Tenet 2007, 172.

⁸⁶ Morgan et al. 2011, 450.

long cultivated affective dispositions, such expressive acts further intensified, channeled, and disciplined emotional experience. Complex mixtures of shock, incredulity, disbelief, and simple affective upheaval were thereby steered through social processes into the more familiar, shared emotions of grief, fear, and outrage.⁸⁷

Mirroring processes further amplified the effects of publicly expressed affective symbols. Although we cannot gain access to the subconscious dimensions of mirroring, we can infer these processes from the public expressions sustained by various media.⁸⁸ Collins notes that photographic and television coverage sustained a process of emotional contagion by “focusing on those individuals in the crowds who were crying, were choking back tears, or otherwise were showing themselves as being overwhelmed by emotion.”⁸⁹ Media sources also amplified messages of anger, with newspaper headlines including titles like “Outrage,” “Massacre,” and “Bastards!” As Kahneman elucidates, media generated anxieties can themselves become the basis of an affect-amplifying dynamic: “the emotional reaction becomes a story in itself, prompting additional coverage in the media, which in turn creates greater concern and involvement.”⁹⁰ Rather than diminishing as the eliciting event receded in time, affective responses were thus amplified by on-going communicative practices.

The attacks of 9/11 therefore produced a constellation of affectively significant stimuli and expressive displays that together swelled into an affective wave. Recognizing these patterns of affective response does not negate the personal significance the event held for each observer. And yet, even as the event activated divergent dispositions and connections, certain among those achieved greater degrees of public focus. The prior existence of shared concerns meant that fear and anger were common responses to a national security threat, but public expression made those emotions the subject of intersubjective mirroring and public veneration.

⁸⁷ Holland 2009.

⁸⁸ Gadarian 2010; Nacos et al. 2007; Spigel 2004.

⁸⁹ Collins, 67.

⁹⁰ Kahneman, 142.

Internationally, the attacks of 9/11 triggered multiple spontaneous outpourings of sympathy. In Britain, there were candle-lit gatherings in front of the U.S. embassy; a changing of the guards to the American national anthem at Buckingham Palace attended by thousands; and a memorial service at St. Paul's Cathedral relayed by loudspeaker to thousands assembled outside who "linked arms and sobbed inconsolably."⁹¹ Correspondingly, the British government enjoyed backing from 70% of its citizens willing to support military action.⁹² In Canada, where newspapers also reported "vigils springing up all over the country," the government had 80% of the public endorsing its choice to offer the United States military assistance.⁹³ Sympathy in France was famously captured by *Le Monde's* headline "We are all Americans," a sentiment echoed by the 96% of French polled who professed solidarity with the United States.⁹⁴ Across various European capitals, individuals assembled for memorial services, publicly lit candles, or placed flowers at the gates of American embassies.⁹⁵

These spontaneous expressions of sympathy constituted emergent solidarities across disparate international actors. As Powell later recalled, "The African states, every alphabet organization, regional organization you can think of... all came on board and expressed solidary and support for the United States—parades of sympathy in Paris, London, and Ottawa and around the world..."⁹⁶ Outside Western allies, similar expressions were visible even in states not traditionally allied with the United States: Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran, for example, were host to public displays of mourning and solidarity.⁹⁷ These responses supply evidence that the affective wave had left in its wake

⁹¹ *Daily Mail*, 15 September 2001: 2, 4.

⁹² "Reaction to Attacks on America," *Gallup News Service*, 2 October 2001, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/4903/Reaction-Attacks-America.aspx>, accessed 3 April 2013.

⁹³ *The Globe and Mail*, 14 September 2001: A14; "Most Canadians backed military support," *Canadian Press*, 29 October 2001.

⁹⁴ *Associated Press*, 12 September 2001; "Reaction to the Attacks on America," *Gallup News Service*.

⁹⁵ "Reaction to the Attacks on America," *Gallup News Service*.

⁹⁶ Former Secretary of State, Colin Powell, interview with author, 7 January 2009.

⁹⁷ "Conferences, concerts, sports matches canceled," *Associated Press*, 12 September 2001; *The Evening Standard*, 14 September 2001: 5; "Chinese Hold Vigil," *Associated Press*, 23 September 2001; "Iran: Candle-lit gathering in Tehran," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 14 September 2001.

unconventional solidarities not defined by some pre-existing cultural or political identity.⁹⁸

PREVAILING CONCERNS AND POLITICAL WINDOWS

Within the United States, the affective wave following 9/11 opened political windows as concerns about security took center stage. In the months after 9/11, polls indicated over 85% of Americans were either “very” or “somewhat” concerned about another attack on the United States. More than two-thirds of Americans also reported being somewhat or very concerned that “they, a friend, or a relative might be a victim.” A “sizeable minority” of Americans believed themselves to be personally at risk from a terrorist attack, despite “the vanishingly small” probability involved.⁹⁹ 9/11 provoked intense affective responses that reshaped public estimates of risk—and, in turn, altered behavior, as significant numbers of Americans changed their transportation choices and personal habits accordingly.¹⁰⁰

Importantly, leaders also reacted in a similarly hypersensitive manner. Rice relates: “Every day since has been September 12 ... every day our overwhelming preoccupation was to avoid another attack.” The event became a “preoccupation” especially for those on the front lines. As Tenet states, “The one thing so many people have missed about the CIA and 9/11... is that it was personal for us.”¹⁰¹ This affective salience attached to the attacks meant that, for the U.S. government possibility, not probability, would play an important role in guiding subsequent counterterrorist efforts. Vice President Richard Cheney stated that, “If there’s a one percent chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al-Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of

⁹⁸ Responses were not uniform: pre-existing dispositions towards animosity produced displays of gloating and happiness. In East Jerusalem, for example, there were reports of residents who “cheered and passed out candy in the streets.” And some Chinese citizens also applauded the destruction in postings online, one of which read: “I’m happy because I hate America.” “Mideast Reactions Mixed,” *UPI*, 11 September 2001; *Washington Post*, 14 September 2001: A26.

⁹⁹ Huddy and Feldman 2011, 457-58.

¹⁰⁰ Floyd et al. 2004; Torabi and Seo 2004.

¹⁰¹ Rice, 79; Tenet, 173.

our response.” “It’s not about our analysis,” he stated, but about “our response.”¹⁰² For both ordinary Americans and leaders, then, affective responses appeared to confirm the expectations of probability neglect—whereby the affective salience of an outcome trumps analysis of its likelihood of occurring.¹⁰³

This swell of anxiety was politically consequential, as it re-set the baseline of public support for government spending in counterterrorism.¹⁰⁴ Public and elite reactions were mutually reinforcing, as leaders felt few hesitations in funding the new “war” on terror; money began flowing rapidly into counterterrorism. Priest and Arkin describe the Bush administration’s allocation requests as “bolder than anything anyone on Capitol Hill could remember receiving: ‘and such sums as necessary for an indefinite period of time.’” One staffer on the House Appropriations Committee “likened the first post-9/11 supplemental budget to ‘a repeal of the Constitution.’” Mueller and Stewart make a powerful argument that the U.S. government and public over-reacted to the events of 9/11 and that the one trillion dollar expansion in U.S. homeland security spending constitutes an unwarranted and extraordinarily wasteful response.¹⁰⁵ Foregrounding affective dynamics suggests, however, that it was virtually impossible for the U.S. government to respond to the event in the restrained manner these authors advocate.

The affective upheaval following 9/11 also opened new political windows by altering public attitudes towards seemingly settled norms of civil and human rights. Although various scholars describe changing normative orientations towards torture,¹⁰⁶ comprehensive data from prior to 9/11 to substantiate such claims is lacking. Nevertheless, polls do show significant shifts in attitudes towards other counterterrorism practices. Surveys from late 2001 suggest increases as high as fifty percentage points from four to six years earlier in the number of Americans believing they would need to “give up some freedoms or civil liberties in order to combat terrorism.”¹⁰⁷ High numbers also

¹⁰² Suskind 2006, 62.

¹⁰³ Sunstein, 122. Mueller estimates the probability of successful nuclear terrorism as closer to one in thirty-five million. See: Mueller 2010, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Gross et al. 2004, 57; Chanley 2002, 478.

¹⁰⁵ Mueller and Stewart 2012, 107.

¹⁰⁶ McKeown 2009.; Jackson, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Huddy et al. 2002, 431.

supported the extralegal assassination of known terrorists (79%, a jump of twenty-five percentage points over three years prior), and of the leaders of countries harboring terrorists (52%, an increase of seventeen points over a question concerning assassinating leaders a decade earlier).¹⁰⁸ Moreover, experimental evidence suggests that the national, ethnic, and racial identity of counterterrorism targets increased public tolerance for security screening and certain rights violations.¹⁰⁹ In this context, the Bush administration was able to rapidly expand its legal powers by lowering standards for warrants as well as allowing non-citizens to be held indefinitely without open trial.¹¹⁰

At elite levels, outrage at the attacks also fueled a desire for revenge. Rumsfeld reports Bush as wanting to “unleash unholy hell.”¹¹¹ Such feelings—combined with a hypersensitive fear of future attacks—arguably helped contribute to justifying counterterrorism practices that might otherwise have been regarded as morally or legally transgressive. As Liberman notes, Bush implies a retributive motive when considering whether to waterboard Khalid Sheikh Mohammed: “I thought about my meeting with Danny Pearl’s widow... I thought about the 2,973 people stolen from their families by al Qaeda on 9/11. And I thought about my duty to protect the country from another act of terror. ‘Damn right,’ I said.”¹¹² The result was a changed landscape of internal practices concerning civil liberties and human rights that some argue amounted to a “norm regress.”¹¹³ As Cofer Black, director of the CIA’s counterterrorist center, testified, “there was ‘before’ 9/11 and ‘after’ 9/11... After 9/11 the gloves come off.”¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ “Impact of the Attacks on America,” *Gallup News Service*, 8 October 2001, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/4972/Impact-Attacks-America.aspx>, accessed 23 April 2013; Gallup/CCFR Survey, October 1998; Great American TV Poll #5, February 1991; both accessed 2 April 2014 from: http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html

¹⁰⁹ Brooks and Manza 2013, 84-107.

¹¹⁰ Jaeger et al. 2003, 299-300; Thomas, 112-13.

¹¹¹ Rumsfeld, 359.

¹¹² Liberman 2011, 2; Bush, 170.

¹¹³ McKeown.

¹¹⁴ “Unclassified: Testimony of Cofer Black,” *Intelligence Resource Program, Federation of American Scientists*, 26 September 2002, http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2002_hr/, accessed 24 April 2013.

THE AFFECTIVE WAVE PRODUCED SPILLOVER

One instance of spillover was the migration of counterterrorism from fighting al Qaeda to invading Iraq. Many commentators have pointed to 9/11 as providing a platform for neoconservatives to execute long-standing plans for a forcible democratization of the Middle East, beginning with an invasion of Iraq.¹¹⁵ While these intentions are significant, their implementation required popular acquiescence.¹¹⁶ Significantly, just weeks after 9/11, support for war against Iraq jumped a dramatic twenty-nine percentage points compared to eight months earlier.¹¹⁷ In other words, affective spillover onto attitudes towards Iraq occurred *prior* to Bush administration efforts to facilitate such connections—and in no small part motivated by a desire to lash out.¹¹⁸ While numerous scholars have focused on the administration’s selling of the war, they have overlooked the ways in which affective spillover had already rendered the U.S. public ready buyers.¹¹⁹

The high levels of affect also spilled over into a dramatic upsurge of support for and trust in the U.S. government, further loosening political constraints. According to Tallman, Bush’s approval rating jumped more than forty points after 9/11 to a high of 92%—“the highest approval ratings on record for any American president.” Other officials, such as Rumsfeld and Powell, experienced similar boosts.¹²⁰ Trust in the government went from 30% before the attacks to 64% afterwards; even the military, CIA, and FBI experienced increased public confidence. As Gaines points out, such an outcome “is quite puzzling... given the manifest failure of government to prevent terrorists from killing thousands.”¹²¹

While rally effects are nothing new to IR,¹²² there is as yet no agreement on the mechanisms generating rally-round-the-flag behavior after 9/11. One school holds that fear of death—as a result of 9/11 confronting individuals with their own mortality—led

¹¹⁵ For example, see Williams 2005.

¹¹⁶ Solomon 2013.

¹¹⁷ Woods 2012, 50.

¹¹⁸ Carnagey and Anderson; Liberman and Skitka 2013.

¹¹⁹ Carnagey and Anderson.

¹²⁰ Tallman 2007, 64; Gaines 2002, 533-34.

¹²¹ Gaines 2002, 435.

¹²² Mueller 1970.

the public to seek solace in patriotic and nationalistic attitudes.¹²³ Others argue that post-9/11 feelings of anger drove support for a president seen to embody the capacity to retaliate.¹²⁴ A third—and not entirely exclusive—explanation holds that it was Bush’s ability to meet the emotional needs which won over public support.¹²⁵ We do not seek to adjudicate between these claims but point out what they have in common—in each, affective spillover plays a central role, as feelings of fear, anger, or anxiety translated into strong positive feelings of attachment.

Lastly, a further manifestation of affective spillover concerns the rise of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiment after the attacks. In the immediate aftermath, over half of Americans reported “unfavorable attitudes toward Muslim and Arab Americans,” while hate crimes against Muslims in the United States jumped seventeen-fold.¹²⁶ As one set of scholars notes, “The moral outrage people experienced in association with 9/11 clearly spilled over to affect not only those specifically responsible for the attacks (i.e., al Qaeda), but also other groups that were at best only symbolically associated with the source of threat.”¹²⁷

AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

The affective wave in turn created a new context for affective politics. The most obvious strategy was manipulation, and many studies of the post-9/11 period have noted how key Bush Administration officials sustained public fears by citing the specter of Al Qaeda, the devastation of Ground Zero, and the uncertainty over WMDs in Iraq. The element of manipulation is epitomized in intonations by Tom Ridge that White House officials may have sought political advantage prior to elections by pushing for more aggressive use of the color-coded threat levels developed by the Department of Homeland Security.¹²⁸

¹²³ Yum and Schenck-Hamlin 2005.

¹²⁴ Lambert et al. 2010.

¹²⁵ Schubert et al. 2002, 576.

¹²⁶ Skitka et al. 2009, 66-67.

¹²⁷ Skitka et al. 2009, 69.

¹²⁸ *New York Times*, 6 September 2009: WK7.

Manipulating public fears also featured in efforts to drum up support for military intervention in Iraq. Scholars have variously pointed to the ways Bush administration officials misrepresented evidence, controlled the flow of information, altered institutional incentives, and practiced rhetorical coercion.¹²⁹ As Solomon argues, however, many available studies posit the efficacy of certain discourses in ways that imply affective mechanisms without explicitly theorizing them.¹³⁰ Taking affective dynamics into account explicitly points us to the ways key administration claims—that Iraq was connected to Al Qaeda, was linked to 9/11, or in possession of WMD—mustered public backing by tapping into the affective residues of 9/11. The Bush administration’s efforts sought to invoke and channel the affective salience of 9/11 and play up ongoing fears; they also worked to appeal to and redirect lingering moral outrage. As Liberman and Skitka find in their survey of poll data, “desires to avenge 9/11 substantially heightened support for war against Iraq in early 2002.”¹³¹

Notably, many of the U.S. reactions appear consistent with what the architects of the 9/11 attacks aimed to achieve. Kydd and Walter argue Al Qaeda sought to gain international support by “goading” the United States into an overreaction.¹³² Indeed, Osama bin Laden boasted of being able to “provoke and bait” the Bush administration.¹³³ As Lake notes, while the rational response would have been moderation, “a key problem is how to maintain this stance in the face of national anger, continued fear, and further attempts by the terrorists to provoke the target.”¹³⁴ The 9/11 attacks were themselves an attempt at affective manipulation.

The affective politics of 9/11 were not, however, confined to manipulation alone. Aware of public sensitivities associated with the attacks, Bush Administration officials sought to

¹²⁹ Mearsheimer, 49-55; Western 2009; Kaufmann 2009; Western; Masters and Alexander 2008; Krebs and Lobasz 2007.

¹³⁰ Solomon 2012, 911.

¹³¹ Liberman 2006; Liberman and Skitka 2008.

¹³² Kydd and Walter, 69-70.

¹³³ “Full transcript of bin Ladin’s speech,” *Aljazeera*, 1 November 2004; <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2004/11/200849163336457223.html>, accessed 19 April 2013; “The Solution,” Bethesda: SITE Intelligence Group, September 2007.

¹³⁴ Lake 2002, 23. On fear and terrorism, see: Ruby 2012.

calibrate their own statements in a way that resonated with public sentiment. One study notes that one of Bush's early speeches succeeded because it "reassured people and channeled their anger."¹³⁵ Calibration was likely a combination of intentional framing and more experimental discoveries. At an event at Ground Zero, Bush improvised: "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you."¹³⁶ The response galvanized political support by mirroring the sentiments of the crowd.

Leaders around the world also calibrated their reactions to the affective climate in the United States, with many engaged in overt displays of sympathy. British Prime Minister Tony Blair was arguably one of the most active in this regard, visiting the United States shortly after the attacks to convey condolences. As one "senior State Department official" later commented, "He knew precisely how to reach out to the American president and the American people in their hour of need."¹³⁷ By Blair's own admission, his was a strategy of calibration so as to influence U.S. behavior: "My concern throughout was to make sure America felt embraced and supported... The fear, but above all the sense of anger and outrage, would be enormous. How it was channeled would be a product... [in part] of how the outside world expressed its sympathy and also sits readiness to share responsibility."¹³⁸

Blair was not alone in his displays. The People's Republic of China (PRC) rapidly drafted a message of condolences and proffered support. Wu Jianmin, a former PRC diplomat, also describes a strategic logic of calibration and display behind PRC behavior: "When a person is in their most desperate plight, if you express sympathy and condolences to them, they will not forget it.... As you can see, diplomacy not only cannot simply exclude human nature, but at times human nature is a key factor in guiding the correct diplomatic decision."¹³⁹ And Russia, for its part, launched a veritable sympathy assault. President Vladimir Putin was the first to call to offer his condolences and subsequently went on national television to proclaim: "we are with you, we entirely and fully share and

¹³⁵ Schubert et al., 578.

¹³⁶ Saurette, 2006, 518.

¹³⁷ Coughlin 2006, 163.

¹³⁸ Blair, 352.

¹³⁹ Wu 2007, 346.

experience your pain. We support you.”¹⁴⁰ That both Russia and the PRC quickly sought to link the 9/11 attacks to their own domestic struggles suggests the calculated motives behind such a strategy of display.¹⁴¹

AFTER-AFFECTS

The 9/11 attacks had a lasting impact in ways that are not appreciated by an exclusive focus on the event’s immediate aftermath. While the affective intensity dissipated in the weeks, months, and years following the attacks, the political strategies discussed above helped to extend those responses through time. Frequent memorials also provided an ongoing engine for public expressions of emotion, recalling high-intensity responses from late 2001 in lower intensity echoes by circulating affectively resonant symbols of that period.¹⁴² Indeed, the memorialization of 9/11 has become its own industry, from kitsch memorabilia available for purchase to the barrage of narratives in television and film generated by Hollywood.¹⁴³ Building on Crawford’s analysis, we could say such practices have effectively “institutionalized” certain affective responses to the attacks.¹⁴⁴ These practices in turn constitute the seeds of political cultivation for particular dispositions and concerns in a new generation of Americans too young to remember the attacks themselves.

To better understand the longer-term impact of 9/11, we need to examine the low-intensity undercurrents and dispositions left in its wake. Initial reactions have subsided but still have not returned to their original baselines. Poll data suggest, for example, a lasting mood of anxiety: almost six years later, 47% of Americans still reported being “very or somewhat worried about being personally harmed by terrorists.”¹⁴⁵ And while the belief that Americans needed to sacrifice civil liberties had diminished by almost thirty

¹⁴⁰ “Vladimir Putin: ‘It Is a Brazen Challenge to the Whole Humanity,’” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 12 September 2001.

¹⁴¹ Hall 2012.

¹⁴² Collins, 67.

¹⁴³ Sturken 2007.

¹⁴⁴ Crawford, 279.

¹⁴⁵ Woods 2011, 215.

percentage points by 2007, it still remained eleven percentage points higher than a decade prior.¹⁴⁶

Reactions to subsequent terrorist attacks also indicate the extent to which dispositions remained sensitive. For example, a 2005 report in the *New York Times* noted that, although the “frantic alarm” of 9/11 had been replaced by “low-grade anxiety,” the London bombings revealed how easily more active fears were restored.¹⁴⁷ Similar dynamics affected popular responses to the 2013 bombings at the Boston Marathon. As a Boston-based expert in anxiety disorders reflected, Americans were more affected by the Marathon bombings because “we’re all imprinted by what happened 12 years ago.”¹⁴⁸ While the overt fears of terrorism subsided in the years following 9/11, anxieties persisting at lower levels of intensity, and their corollary dispositions, lingered like exposed nerves.

VALUE AMENDED

Rationalist skeptics might argue that our analysis is largely explicable as a story of Bayesian updating: The attacks supplied new information, and actors correspondingly updated their beliefs resulting in increased demands for security. As time passed without further major attacks, beliefs readjusted to a diminished perception of threat without returning to pre-attack levels. But such an account contains significant blindspots. For one, it fails to capture affective spillover. The emotions elicited by 9/11 colored attitudes towards actors or targets connected only by superficial similarity, such as Arab-Americans or Iraq. Furthermore, a Bayesian approach misses how affective reactions can influence the salience of beliefs even in the absence of new information. To illustrate, repeated references by U.S. policymakers to 9/11 helped to keep political windows open by fueling affective reactions even without offering new information.¹⁴⁹

Most importantly, a Bayesian approach is indeterminate. Post hoc one can certainly posit low prior beliefs about the likelihood of terrorist attacks and attribute strong levels of

¹⁴⁶ Skitka et al., 66.

¹⁴⁷ *New York Times*, 8 July 2005: A1.

¹⁴⁸ *USA TODAY*, 16 April 2013: A1.

¹⁴⁹ Westen 2008, 364-67.

significance to 9/11 in ways that correspond to the large belief shifts we observed. But one could imagine positing a priori other values for those variables resulting in little shift at all. That Al Qaeda wanted to attack the United States was no secret, and 9/11 could have been interpreted not as harbinger of a sustained assault, but as an “aberration”¹⁵⁰—a one-time, low-tech exploitation of existing weaknesses in a manner virtually impossible to replicate once known. It is by taking into account the affective impact of the attacks—collapsing towers broadcast in real-time and their emotional aftermath—and the subsequent affective wave these elicited that we are able to better hone our expectations of a massive reaction, or even “overreaction.”¹⁵¹

Alternatively, constructivist skeptics might argue what really matters is how the U.S. response was discursively articulated into the “war on terror.” Croft writes: “Terrorism is not a more common event than deaths through cancer or traffic accidents... But it feels different. That is the power of discourse.”¹⁵² And yet by emphasizing feeling, Croft also describes the power of affect. While constructivists have pointed to the role of agents in shaping the meaning of crises or critical junctures like 9/11,¹⁵³ such accounts miss how the ascendancy of particular discourses may be closely interrelated with their ability to articulate, channel, and make sense of already existing affective responses. Moreover, by privileging more incremental forms of socialization, constructivists also overlook both accelerated forms of affectively induced normative change—for example, how anger and fear can rapidly eclipse prior concerns about civil rights—and emergent forms of identity construction—such as the new constellations of transnational sympathy engendered by the attacks. Placed against a backdrop of shared outrage after 9/11, it is not difficult to comprehend how the “language of medieval conflict—of finding al Qaeda and putting their ‘heads on sticks’... soon caught on around [the U.S.] government, mustering aggression.”¹⁵⁴ Discourses may be disembodied; their appeal is not.

¹⁵⁰ Mueller 2002.

¹⁵¹ Sunstein.

¹⁵² Croft 2006, 286.

¹⁵³ Widmaier 2007.

¹⁵⁴ Suskind, 21.

Conclusion

By amending existing understandings of actorhood to include human affective experience, we can begin to proffer a fuller accounting of the myriad consequences of 9/11. The 9/11 attacks generated a high-intensity affective wave felt across the public and elite levels, domestically and internationally. This shockwave rippled through a multitude of social practices that, in turn, channeled public energy toward familiar symbols and recognizable forms of grief and outrage. These affective responses also generated new demands and anxieties, spilled over to other targets, and created windows of opportunity for strategies of affective calibration, manipulation, and display.

Affective dynamics were implicated in 9/11 not because terrorism is an exceptional domain of “irrational” behavior but because it, like other political phenomena, involves the experiences and concerns of actual human beings. Whereas IR theories tend to abstract and simplify actorhood into something disembodied and cognitively-driven, the practice of international politics remains inextricable from the biological, psychological, and social characteristics of human actors. Across a wide variety of challenges and practices of interest to IR scholars—from international conflicts to the many projects comprising global governance— affective dynamics provide the potential for both stubborn intransigence and dramatic changes in preferences, loyalties, and beliefs. These changes become, in turn, conditions of possibility for a range of political strategies. International politics reflect our humanity; theories of international relations should as well.

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