Upon reading his prematurely published obituary, Mark Twain famously quipped that rumors of his death were greatly exaggerated. Those of us who advance scholarship at the intersection of international security studies and biopolitics would amend Twain: any rumor of its acceptance has been greatly exaggerated.

At the beginning of “the century of biology,” when we reflect on the relationship between the discipline of international security studies and biopolitics, there are reasons for both hope and despair. In this commentary, I would like to explore those reasons and identify avenues of research at the nexus of biopolitics and international security studies.

I. Reasons for pessimism

The reasons for despair are multiple, and I have explored some of these causes earlier in this journal.1 In sum, the false arguments of determinism and reductionism, the fear of the abuse of evolutionary arguments, and the suspicion that evolution undermines the dominant ideology of political liberalism, hinder scientific progress and professional acceptance. A half-decade later, I would like to make three additional observations.

First, even with the advance of scholarship in the field, what was true earlier this decade remains so: the discipline has yet to acknowledge the importance of the insights provided by biopolitics. A review of the relevant literatures demonstrates that many authors address root causes of warfare, ethnic conflict, and psychological approaches to international security without any acknowledgement of the biopolitical approach or comprehension of what it can add to the study of these important topics.

Accordingly, there is little professional recognition of our approach at annual conventions such as the American Political Science Association (APSA) or the International Studies Association (ISA). Since most security scholars are unfamiliar with the importance of the life sciences and their relationship to the social sciences, this ignorance is often reflected in the major professional associations.

Second, an evolutionary approach requires a sea change in thought about the origins of political behavior. The biopolitical approach places humans in an evolutionary context. Thus, many political and, more broadly, social behaviors, should be seen as a product of environmental adaptations. The evolutionary origins of these behaviors remain with us today and interact with social causes of behavior.

Many of our colleagues in international security studies are armed only with social causes of behavior. Of course, for some issues, such perspectives are entirely appropriate since evolutionary insights may not be particularly salient, as for example, in an analysis of START treaty follow-on negotiations. However, for fundamental questions (e.g., the origins of warfare) and many contemporary security questions...