

We write to you in regards to “Keeping Your Friends Close, But Acquaintances Closer: Why Weakly Allied States Make Loyal Coalition Partners” (manuscript # ISQ-2019-02-0094), which you submitted to *International Studies Quarterly*.

We have received reviews from two highly qualified scholars. Please find their reports below.

Unfortunately, their assessments provide us with insufficient support to continue the review process. *ISQ* receives an extraordinarily large number of submissions each year, and we can only pursue publication for a few of these manuscripts. This means that we must decline a number of high- quality and promising submissions.

In brief:

- All reviewers find the manuscript interesting and important. Still, each reviewer notes a number of theoretical and empirical weaknesses. The editorial team also carefully reviewed your manuscript and sees similar weaknesses in the paper.
- Both reviewers note theoretical problems. Reviewer 1 points out that the lack of the clarity of the main concepts makes the theoretical argument of the manuscript weak. Reviewer 2 raises a question whether the findings can be applied to the other cases than Afghanistan and encourages the author to discuss this issue further.
- The reviewers write the weaknesses in research design and empirical analysis. Both reviewers are not convinced by the measurement of the dependent variable and note that the author should improve it. Reviewer 1 suggests the author to include a descriptive table to help readers better able to understand the distribution of contributions and to add the examples of anecdotic evidence to show the causal mechanisms or processes of the argument. Reviewer 2 mentions that the indicator of the main independent variable does not appropriately capture the meaning of the variable.

Thank you for considering *International Studies Quarterly* for the publication of your research. We hope that the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from allowing us to consider future manuscripts.

Sincerely,  
The Editors

Lead Editors: Brandon Prins & Krista Wiegand, University of Tennessee, Knoxville| Associate Editors: Pinar Bilgin, Bilkent University; Ajin Choi, Yonsei University; Martin Edwards, Seton Hall University; Courtney Hillebrecht, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Wonjae Hwang, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Brian Phillips, University of Essex; Laura Shepherd, The University of Sydney; Robert Trager, UCLA

## Reviews

### Reviewer 1

The article examines why states join wartime coalitions despite an absence of a salient national threat or strong ties to the coalition leader. It is argued that this is because states want to signal their desire for a stronger relationship with the coalition leader. This hypothesis is examined with a data-set on relative country-level troop contributions to the Afghanistan War. Overall, this is a very good article. It starts from an interesting research puzzle, discusses the literature very well and attempts to make an original contribution to the field. However, there are some important issues that need to be addressed before the article can be published.

The author introduces a new theoretical argument for explaining contributions to military operations. However, this would be more convincing if the author could be more specific about what is

substantially meant by “dissatisfied with the current alliance relationship”. On page 10 in the theory section, s/he argues that this is the difference between alliance depth and alignment of foreign policy preferences, but it is not clear to me to what this measure refers to empirically. Do states with a low score on this measure want a deeper relationship? What do they want specifically? A formal alliance with the US? Is there case-based/anecdotal evidence that there are states that want a deeper relationship with the US. Australia is mentioned, but there is no evidence provided that Australia wants a stronger relationship with the US, nor is it clear what this would mean in practice.

It is not clear to me why states that are optimally aligned with the central coalition actor would make higher absolute contributions, while states that want a stronger relationship make higher relative contributions. Why absolute for states with strong relationship and relative for states that want a stronger relationship with the US? I would suggest to delete figure 2, given that it does not really add much to the discussion.

The empirical analysis is not entirely convincing to me.

I am not entirely convinced about how the dependent variable is measured. Burdens are indeed always calculated as a ratio between the contribution and some measure of a state's capacity to contribute. However, there are several issues with taking military personnel as a measure of capacity, given that there are very important differences between the quality of troops of different states and what is considered military personnel in different states. Moreover, it does not really say much about the relative cost of a contribution. Finally, such a measure has the tendency to strongly overestimate the contributions of small states and underestimate the contributions of large states. The contribution table on p. 2 also is not very clear to me: does this imply that Denmark has contributed 66% of its armed forces or 0.66%? Given that Denmark has around 22000 troops, the former seems quite high. However, if it is the latter, do such small percentages really tell us anything substantially? Moreover, there is not really an explanation for why military personnel is used rather than military spending or GDP. The motivation is written on p. 13, but does not really make sense: “the cost of a state's contribution is measured... since the risk of casualties and collateral damage are two costs unique to personnel contributions.... However, this does not tell us anything about why personnel contributions are divided by military personnel. Finally, the author does not distinguish between types of troop or whether they are in a combat zone (p. 14). While I understand that it is difficult (but not impossible, cf the work of Auerswald and Saideman) to find data on this, I am not convinced that “national politicians are less likely to make that distinction. The author does not really provide any arguments or sources for why this would be the case. Figure 1 is not that useful, it is not very surprising that contributions change as a the measure of contributions changes.

I am also not convinced by the main independent variable. Does this really measure whether or not states are dissatisfied with their alliance relationship with the US? I genuinely cannot tell from the manuscript. First of all, it is not clear what “dissatisfied” means. The author discusses his measure, but does not discuss what this measure measures. Second, the author does not discuss what Benson and Clinton's measure measures. Only when both issues are resolved, it is possible to assess whether the independent variable actually measures what the author claims it measures. Moreover, there really should be some clear case-based evidence that shows that countries that have a high score on “dissatisfaction” are actually not satisfied with their alliance with the US.

What is missing in the paper is a descriptive table of the contributors to the Afghanistan operation. I would really need to know the average absolute contribution of each participant, their average relative contribution and their score on the “dissatisfaction index”. Who are the dissatisfied countries that overcontributed? Are there dissatisfied countries that did not overcontribute? If the number of dissatisfied overcontributors is quite low, a qualitative research design seems to be a better option.

A major issue with the analysis is that the Afghanistan operation strongly overlapped with the

Iraq operation. The latter operation seems to provide a better opportunity to signal a states' commitment with the US. I think if the author really wants to make his/her point,s/he should also take into account contributions to the Iraq War.

Finally, the paper really needs at least one or two examples of anecdotic or case-based evidence of cases that overcontributed because they are not satisfied with their relationship with the US. In the fifth section, the author mentions Denmark, New Zealand and Romania. However, two of these countries are NATO-allies. Are they really not satisfied with their relationship with the US? The overcontribution of New-Zealand, in turn, might be an artefact of its low number of military personnel.

To sum up, the paper has an interesting theoretical argument, but at this point, the empirical evidence for this argument is not convincing. Revisions will only result in an "accept" decision if the latter issue is convincingly addressed.

#### Reviewer 2

This article contends that countries frequently use commitments to coalition war efforts to signal their desire for a closer relationship with a dominant state, with the signal seen as more credible than most because it is costly. This claim is tested quantitatively by examining coalition member commitments to the war in Afghanistan, with the predictor a latent measure of desired alliance strength (based on similarity in preferences) and the dependent variable the share of a country's total military forces that are committed to the war effort.

This project presents reasonable normal-science research, and I could see publishing it after revisions, but not at a journal of ISQ's prominence. My central objections here are that the core finding is relatively unimportant, that are reasonable questions that might be raised about how well this argument travels beyond Afghanistan, and that I'm not convinced that the test that's presented is really the best one for the theory. I mention a few other suggestions for improvement at the end of my review, but will focus on these three issues, because they are the ones that drive my overall assessment. As I said, I think that this is a worthwhile project, and my review would be more positive (while still requesting significant revisions) at a journal like CMPS, which is the sort of place where I could easily imagine this article ultimately being published.

First, I'm just not convinced that the substantive importance of this finding is sufficient to merit publication in ISQ. While it's true that the US has demonstrated a strong preference for fighting in a coalition, in practice the military effort is overwhelmingly borne by a small number of states, with the US chief among them. Put bluntly, whether or not New Zealand contributes to the Afghanistan mission is not a factor that will determine its success or failure. At a minimum, I wanted to see more justification for why we should care about this finding.

Second, both the logic of the theory and the empirical test focus entirely on Afghanistan, and it's not clear how well the argument and findings would travel to other coalitions. A counterinsurgency campaign against a weak adversary far from home is very different from a conventional war against a more closer adversary with a stronger ability to strike back (though perhaps the increase in transnational terrorism generates more concern about being attacked at home than was present for most of the Afghanistan conflict). Moreover, the fact that NATO invoked Article 5 after 9/11 created a presumption that NATO members should contribute, which is not present even in cases like Iraq, Libya, or Vietnam. I would encourage the authors to do more to talk about why this argument should apply to other cases. (One limited step in this direction would be to talk about historical examples such as Sardinia-Piedmont in the Crimean War, which clearly entered the war to curry favor with Napoleon III.)

Third, I'm not convinced that the empirical test is appropriate. There are a couple concerns here. On the

independent variable side, the central measure is the gap between a country's desired level of alliance alignment with the US and the observed level. My concern here is that observed alliance levels may not precisely capture closeness of the relationship in practice. The paradigmatic example here would be a country like Israel, which should presumably score extremely highly on this measure given the absence of any formal alliance relationship, but in practice need not worry about this situation because it is so clear that the US will back Israel. A similar argument holds for Australia and New Zealand, the countries most commonly cited in this article. (A separate question is why, given the ANZUS alliance, these countries should score so much lower than NATO countries – in general, I would have liked to see the article unpack what's going on with the independent variable far more than it did, if necessary through an appendix.)

Separately, despite the authors' arguments, I'm not convinced that the measure of the dependent variable – the share of the country's military that is committed to the war effort – is the appropriate one. The problem is that it takes the country's total military size as unproblematically exogenous, when it's also affected by policy. If told that a country that has a giant economy and large population was sending a small force but that it was still a good signal of commitment because they only have a small army, American policymakers would likely object that the country should have a larger army. These concerns would be minimized if the results hold when adjusting by GDP or by total population, but there's nothing presented here to suggest that they do.

Aside from those general concerns, there are some more specific comments and suggestions that I raise in case they're helpful in future revisions:

- 1) The title references loyalty of alliance partners, but it's not clear that these countries make enduring commitments, only that the commitments are large when made.
- 2) I appreciated the authors' efforts to provide information about the data, but I found some of the approaches less useful than they could be. Table 1 leaves unclear which of the contributors should be seen as surprising, while figure 1 is hard to read for many of the countries of interest (the caption references Denmark and New Zealand, for example, but they're both small and hard to see).
- 3) On the theory front, I wasn't convinced by the argument that success in war is a private good. What exactly is the private good that could be gained through success in Afghanistan? Weakening the Taliban/al Qaeda should benefit anyone who might be targeted, and it's hard to imagine that the US would be willing or able to permit terrorist attacks to occur in a non-contributing country while preventing them in contributing countries.
- 4) Also on the theory front, I struggled a little with the behavior of the dominant state here. If a coalition partner is contributing a lot absent a strong formal alliance, why exactly should I see the need to build a stronger alliance?
- 5) On page 10, the discussion notes that the theory is not inconsistent with arguments grounded in domestic politics. That said, it's not really consistent, either – they seem pretty orthogonal.
- 6) I wanted more information about the Benson and Clinton data on pg. 14.