

# Keeping Your Friends Close, But Acquaintances Closer: Why Weakly Allied States Make Committed Coalition Partners

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June 11, 2019

## Abstract

Why do states join wartime coalitions despite the absence of a salient threat or strong ties to the coalition leader? We argue states make unexpectedly high contributions to coalition warfare as a costly signal of their desire for a stronger relationship with the coalition leader. Conventional theories insufficiently explain why states without immediate security interests or strong ties to the lead state over-contribute relative to their capacity. Using newly compiled data on troop contributions to the war in Afghanistan (2001-2014), we find states are most likely to contribute a higher share of their armed forces when their relationship with the US has unrealized alliance potential. These states with moderate – but under-performing – alignments leave substantial room for subsequent gains to be had from signaling their commitment to the leading coalition actor. Our finding helps explain why states risk the costs of war – casualties and domestic accountability – by participating in coalition warfare.

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We thank members of the Center for Peace and Security Studies (cPASS), in particular Erik Gartzke, Rex Douglass, Matthew Millard, Michael Rubin, Thomas Scherer, and Alexandra Woodruff as well as Jan Angstrom, James Fowler, Luke Sanford, Rachel Schoner, and Camber Warren for their comments and suggestions. Erin Ling, Amanda Madany, Cole Reynolds, Effie Sun, Alexandra Vignau, Erin Werner, and Lisa Yen provided invaluable research assistance. Previous drafts were presented at the 2018 American Political Science Association conference and 2018 Political Networks Conference. This research was sponsored by Office of Naval Research Grant N00014-14-1-0071 and the Department of Defense Minerva Research Initiative. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Office of Naval Research.