Dear Paul Huth,

Thank you for the conditional accept on our manuscript “Keeping Your Friends Close, but Acquaintances Closer” for consideration at JCR. Since receiving your feedback on August 17, 2020, we have made revisions to the manuscript based on your suggestions and feedback.

The section we were asked to revise concerned the description of the control variables and their relationship to the primary IV (unrealized alliance potential). Below, I include the original suggestion for that revision from reviewer 1 and the editor, the original manuscript paragraphs in question, as well as the newly revised paragraphs. The newly revised paragraphs are an exact copy of what is provided in the full manuscript and are provided here just for ease of reading.

We feel this has significantly improved the quality of the manuscript and should address the only remaining concern regarding how to improve the paper. Thank you again for the time and effort put into your thoughtful comments.

Sincerely,

J Andres Gannon and Daniel Kent

Editor comments

*My only remaining concern is that your discussion of control variables on pp.17 and 19 should be further improved as noted by R1. From my reading, you focus on the relationship of the controls to the outcome variables but offer little by way of how the controls are causes of your primary IV centering on unrealized alliance potential. I would like to see you revise the text on pp.17 and 19 to provide more discussion of this.*

Reviewer: 1 Comments to the Author

*I'm pleased with how the authors addressed my concerns about the theory, but the authors still don't seem to have justified their controls. On page 19, they note that CINC, distance, casualties, alliance with the US, and regime type could account for the costliness/size of contributions (the outcome variables) but not that any of these would also account for unrealized alliance potential. To my mind, that's still got to be done before the paper merits publication.*

Original controls section

4.2 Model and Results

Our unit of analysis for these models is the country-year, spanning from 2001-2014. Our dependent variable for each model is the percent of a state’s total troops contributed to Afghanistan annually. The primary predictor of interest operationalizes “unrealized alliance potential" – the difference between a country’s United Nations voting similarity with the United States and the depth of its alliance with the United States. Because our theory is linear and our outcome is continuous we estimate a series of linear regressions. We also run a fixed effects model to check if the estimated effect of interest holds once we account for time-invariant unobserved confounders.

The four categories of existing explanations for coalition warfare contribution – collective action, balance of threat, alliance dependence, and domestic politics – are used to identify a battery of proper control variables. We limit our model to these control variables in line with recommendations against “garbage can" regressions (Ray 2003; Bleek and Lorber 2014). Existing theories suggest observable indicators of these variables are causally related and prior to the dependent and independent variables of interest.

We include a measure of the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) as well as economic measures of logged GDP and logged GDP per capita in line with the collective action hypothesis that the highest contributions should come from states with larger military and economic capacity because alliances are public goods (Olson and Zeckhauser 1966; Singer, Bremer and Stuckey 1972). Because the balance of threat hypothesis posits state contributions should be proportional to the gravity of the threat, we include a variable for geographic distance from Afghanistan to proxy for how likely a country is to be affected by instability and conflict in the region (Weidmann, Kuse and Gleditsch 2010). To account for changes in the perceived threat during the course of the conflict, we include lagged casualties since states experiencing casualties may consequently scale down their contributions. Because casualty aversion is closely associated with domestic explanations of coalition participation, this measure also accounts for theories about domestic determinants (Koch and Gartner 2005; Jakobsen and Ringsmose 2015). Sine other domestic explanations are more broadly concerned with regime type, we include a control variable for whether a state is a democracy. For example, Gartzke (2001) and Gartzke and Gleditsch (2004) argue that democracies may be less reliable allies because high information costs and short leader tenure make commitments less guaranteed. To differentiate our explanatory variable from existing explanations of alliance dependence, we include variables for UN voting similarity and presence of an alliance with the United States (Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten 2017). Current theories argue that troop contributions are most likely from a state’s existing allies because you can leverage your relationship with allies to encourage contributions (Davidson 2011b). We expect these variables to have positive coefficients, but that unrealized alliance potential has explanatory power above and beyond when it comes to the amount of troops that states contributed.

Revised controls section

4.2 Model and Results

Our unit of analysis for these models is the country-year, spanning from 2001-2014. Our dependent variable for each model is the percent of a state’s total troops contributed to Afghanistan annually. The primary predictor of interest operationalizes “unrealized alliance potential" – the difference between a country’s United Nations voting similarity with the United States and the depth of its alliance with the United States. Because our theory is linear and our outcome is continuous we estimate a series of linear regressions. We also run a fixed effects model to check if the estimated effect of interest holds once we account for time-invariant unobserved confounders.

We identify a battery of proper control variables informed by existing explanations for coalition warfare contribution – collective action, balance of threat, alliance dependence, and domestic politics – as well as variables that could account for the independent variable – unrealized alliance potential. Existing theories suggest observable indicators of these variables

are causally related and prior to the dependent and independent variables of interest. These control variables guard against a spurious association between our predictor and outcome of interest by blocking potential backdoor paths. We limit our model to these control variables in line with recommendations against “garbage can" regressions (Ray 2003; Bleek and Lorber 2014).

To differentiate our explanatory variable from existing explanations of alliance dependence, we include variables for UN voting similarity and presence of an alliance with the United States (Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten 2017). Current theories argue that troop contributions are most likely from a state’s existing allies because you can leverage your relationship with allies to encourage contributions (Davidson 2011b). We expect these variables to have positive coefficients, but that unrealized alliance potential has explanatory power above and beyond when it comes to the amount of troops that states contributed. Similarly, we include a control for whether a country is already a U.S. ally, because formal alliances are the baseline necessity for producing the strategic bonds necessary to eliminate unrealized alliance potential.

Since other domestic explanations are more broadly concerned with regime type, we include a control variable for whether a state is a democracy. For example, Gartzke (2001) and Gartzke and Gleditsch (2004) argue that democracies may be less reliable allies because high information costs and short leader tenure make commitments less guaranteed. On the other hand, there is a higher chance that alliance potential is already realized" in states that share the same regime type as the United States (Simon and Gartzke 1996; Gibler and Wolford 2006).

To account for changes in the perceived threat during the course of the conflict, we include lagged casualties since states experiencing casualties may consequently scale down their contributions. Because casualty aversion is closely associated with domestic explanations of coalition participation, this measure also accounts for theories about domestic determinants (Koch and Gartner 2005; Jakobsen and Ringsmose 2015).

We include a measure of the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) as well as economic measures of logged GDP and logged GDP per capita in line with the collective action hypothesis that the highest contributions should come from states with larger military and economic capacity because alliances are public goods (Olson and Zeckhauser 1966; Singer, Bremer and Stuckey 1972). Aggregated capabilities and economic capacity could also influence unrealized alliance potential because national capability impacts the ability of a potential partner to deter (Walt 1987), because asymmetrical alliances are longer lasting (Morrow 1991; Blankenship 2017), and because economic capacity impacts how much a state can contribute and whether they seek economic payoffs from troops contributions (Bove and Elia 2011; Henke 2019a).

Because the balance of threat hypothesis posits state contributions should be proportional to the gravity of the threat, we include a variable for geographic distance from Afghanistan to proxy for how likely a country is to be affected by instability and conflict in the region (Weidmann, Kuse and Gleditsch 2010). There is also well-established evidence that proximity to areas of strategic interest influences alliance decisions because of factors like deterrence credibility, alliance reliability, and base location (Joyce and Braithwaite 2013; Bak 2018; Nieman et al. 2020).