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Norms, Diplomatic Alternatives, and the Social Psychology of War Support

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Abstract: Using experiments, we show that subjects who are asked about their support for war without being told about diplomatic strategies to deal with crises back military operations at levels consistent with people who are told that the alternatives to war are of low quality. In contrast, subjects who are told that diplomacy could work to resolve conflicts express less support for military operations. These results suggest that, in the absence of conflicting evidence, people premise their support for war on the assumption that leaders use force as a last resort. Implications for the study of success as an influence on public attitudes about U.S. military operations are considered.[4]

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Roughly three months before launching Operation Iraqi Freedom, United States (U.S.) President George W. Bush held a meeting with Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski. The Polish President's support of war with Iraq was churning up anti-American sentiments in Poland and hurting his popularity. The protests were sure to be temporary, Bush assured Kwasniewski, because "[s]uccess helps change public opinion" (quoted in Woodward 2004, 275). Two weeks later, Bush delivered a similar message about success to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi: "We have put together a lethal military, and we will kick [Saddam's] ass . . . This is going to change. You watch, public opinion will change" (quoted in Woodward 2004, 297).

Several studies confirm President Bush's belief that expectations of success increase support for military action even when the prospect of significant casualties looms large (e.g., Eichenberg 2005; Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009). The evidence led Feaver and Gelpi (2004, 97) to conclude that Americans are "defeat phobic, not casualty phobic" -- a remarkable claim given the longstanding view that war support inevitably declines as battle deaths mount (Mueller 1970). Not only does it mean that democratic leaders can avoid tortured efforts to devise war plans that minimize casualties without sacrificing military effectiveness, the success research also suggests that democratic governments can use force more frequently than previously thought. Indeed, one review concludes that the results of the work on success challenges the Liberal claim that people are inherently skeptical of military action and restrain democratically elected leaders from engaging in war (Drezner 2008).

Yet, claims about success overlook evidence that people do not regard military achievement as an unalloyed good. In 2002-2003, for instance, 60% of Americans believed that a U.S. military victory in Iraq was likely (CNN/Time poll, November 13-14, 2002). Nevertheless, 63% of the public said they preferred a diplomatic solution to the crisis over a military one (CBS

News poll, January 4-6, 2003). This apparent preference for diplomatic strategies mirrors a reaction Americans had during the prelude to the first Gulf War. As Mueller points out (1994, 35), 54% of those polled registered support for war when the possibility of using economic sanctions against Saddam Hussein was not mentioned. In contrast, 46% of Americans backed the use of force when reminded that sanctions remained an option.

This sensitivity to cues about alternatives is not simply a question wording effect that complicates analyses of polls. On the contrary, research in psychology suggests that the availability of quality alternatives is an important predictor of people's attachments to long term goals (Rusbult 1980). The work on success has not, however, considered how the availability of diplomatic alternatives to the use of force might influence war support. Instead, success' effects have been examined without reference to the choices available to leaders, even though non-war options are often debated alongside proposals to use force. As Senator Edward M. Kennedy explained in stating his opposition to the second Gulf War, "Resorting to war is not America's only or best course at this juncture. There are realistic alternatives between doing nothing and declaring unilateral or immediate war. War should be a last resort, not the first response."

We argue that studies of success that omit cues about alternative courses of action generate inflated estimates of people's tolerance of casualties and support for military operations. Omitting information about the feasibility of diplomatic strategies can induce people to conclude that non-war courses of action are unattractive, strengthening their willingness to back military action. This happens, we think, because the public tends to believe that force is a tactic of last resort – to be used only after other feasible alternatives are exhausted. Because this principle operates in the background, people who receive no information about diplomatic alternatives are likely to express levels of support for war that are indistinguishable from those who hear that

non-war alternatives are unattractive. In contrast, people who receive cues that suggest diplomatic alternatives are viable are likely to express less support for war. There may be people who dislike defeat so much they are willing to pay any price to secure military victory, but like Page and Bouton (2006), our work suggests that more Americans are cost conscious in foreign policy.

We demonstrate what can happen when people are denied information about alternatives to the use of force through three experiments that pair replications of studies conducted by Feaver and Gelpi (2004) and Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009) with studies that cue subjects about non-war courses of action, but otherwise mirror the originals. Subjects who received no cues about diplomacy express a tolerance for casualties and degree of support for war consistent with subjects who are told non-war courses of action are poor substitutes for violence. In contrast, subjects in two of our studies who were told that non-war options are viable substitutes for the use of force were less likely than others to either express support for war or indicate casualty insensitivity. In the third study, our results suggest that war support is influenced by the interaction of cues about alternatives, success, and casualties.

To be clear, it is not our intention to challenge claims about success' effects on war support. Instead, our work is designed to use an established research tradition to demonstrate the effects of information about alternative courses of action on support. In this sense, our research builds on studies of success by identifying the conditions under which the allure of military victory is likely to generate the greatest enthusiasm for war and the conditions under which it is less likely to shape public attitudes. More generally, our work suggests that bias in estimates of public support for war may be an issue across a range of studies that do not account for the influence of social norms regarding the use of force.

Literature Review

While it was once thought that public support in the US for military conflicts inevitably declined in the face of American battle deaths (Mueller 1970), more recent work finds that a host of variables temper the effects of casualties on war support. Demographic factors like gender and race, for example, influence the public's support for military missions with women and African-Americans less tolerant of casualties than men and Whites (Eichenberg 2003; Gartner and Segura 2000). Casualty sensitivity, the reaction people have to battle deaths in terms of their support for military operations, also appears to be greater among people who are more likely to know the pain of war either personally or via friends and family (Karol and Miguel 2007).

Beyond these individual-level determinants, crisis specific factors also influence the public's reactions to casualties. Faced with the prospect of U.S. military action, Americans examine the underlying goal military action is supposed to achieve (the "primary policy objective" (PPO)) as well as the prospects for assistance from allies and international organization before backing the use of force. Operations designed to restrain the foreign policies of other states garner the most support from the public while missions designed to engineer regime change or bolster internal stability are viewed more skeptically (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998). Similarly, the public appears to prefer multilateral operations to unilateral ones and missions that secure the endorsement of international organizations over ones that do not (Grieco et al. 2011; Kull and Destler 1999; Page and Bouton 2006).

During military operations, levels of support for military conflicts appear to track the degree of elite consensus about an operation's merits (Larson 1996). When leaders are unanimous in their support for military missions, the public is less sensitive to American

casualties. However, public support for military operations erodes when elites disagree about the wisdom of war – an effect that runs along partisan lines (Berinsky 2009). That is, individuals support wars as long as leading members of their political party support those wars as well. The mass media's coverage of elite cleavages seems to matter as well (Baum and Groeling 2010).

Perhaps the most striking and controversial finding, however, is that expectations of success matter most in determining war support. In several studies, Feaver and Gelpi (2004) and Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009) showed that expectations of success influenced (1) the number of battle deaths members of the public regarded as "acceptable" (Feaver and Gelpi 2004), (2) levels of support for initiating hypothetical military operations (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009) and (3) trends in support for military operations during periods of fighting in conflicts ranging from Vietnam to Iraq (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/2006, 2009). No other argument challenges claims about the US public's casualty phobia so directly. On the contrary, previous research suggests that the public tolerates casualties only for short periods (Gartner and Segura 1998).

The notion that the US public cares more about losing than about casualties is supported by a variety of studies of US public opinion during American military operations. Eichenberg's (2005) examination of every poll published between 1981 and 2005 addressing uses of force by the US military shows that public support for war is influenced by mission success, controlling for the "principle policy objective." This result is echoed in Larson's (1996) analysis and in work by Gartner (2008). Using several innovative survey experiments, Gartner found that the public's level of support for war is sensitive to casualty trajectories. Short-term increases in the number of battle deaths reduce war support by leading the public to conclude that military operations are going poorly. This point is underscored by Boettcher and Cobb (2006), who show that the frames

used to contextualize casualty counts are significant: when the ratio of US casualties to insurgent deaths is favorable, the public's sensitivity to American battle deaths declines.

Yet, there are reasons to question whether expectations of success influence pre-war attitudes as much as recent work suggests. The problem, as we see it, is that the questions used to examine success' effects on public attitudes present scenarios in which the use of force is the only option under consideration. Feaver and Gelpi (2004, 106), for example, asked this question:

> When American troops are sent overseas, there are almost always casualties. For instance, 43 Americans were killed in Somalia, 383 in the Gulf War, roughly 54,000 in Korea, roughly 58,000 in Vietnam, and roughly 400,000 in World War II. Imagine for a moment that a President decided to send military troops on one of the following missions. In your opinion, what would be the *highest* number of American military deaths that would be acceptable to achieve this? (*italics* in original)

The trouble with presenting scenarios in which the decision to use force is the only option under consideration is that it can lead respondents to infer that non-war solutions are impractical. Force is widely seen as an activity that should be pursued only if all other reasonable strategies have been exhausted. For this reason, respondents who are not told about the status of alternative courses of action are likely to conclude that the choices available to leaders are unattractive, causing them to increase their stated support for war. In short, it is doubtful that remaining silent on the availability of alternatives to the use of force is innocuous. On the contrary, the absence of cues about alternatives may incline respondents to support uses of force more strongly than they would if they knew diplomacy was an option. As a result, the work on success may overstate the degree to which the promise of victory fuels the public's enthusiasm for conflict.

Alternatives and the psychology of support for war

In this section, we discuss how information about the availability of alternative courses of action influences attitudes about the use of force, beginning with the observation that governments are frequently able to use a range of strategies to address foreign policy challenges. Encouraging other countries to exercise restraint toward others, for example, can be achieved by forging alliances, purchasing arms, using force, and, in some cases, through diplomacy. Foreign policy decision makers, in other words, are often in the position of choosing among a variety of substitutable courses of action.

In democracies, the public's preference for one course of action over another can be expected to play a role in determining the policy approach leaders choose. In fact, it appears that the more people know about international events, the more aware they become of the availability of alternative courses of action, and the more pressure they put on leaders to shift from doing nothing to something (Regan 2000). Precisely how the public selects among the available foreign policy strategies is less clear.

One answer to this question is found in the research on the psychology of commitment (see Koch 2011, for an application of this research to the issue of casualty sensitivity and voting). According to this work, a person's willingness to express support for a foreign policy is the product of factors that either promote attachments or undermine them. The primary attractive forces are *satisfaction*, defined as "positivity of affect or attraction to one's relationship" (Rusbult 1983, 102) or goal, and *investments*, the tangible (e.g., property) and intangible (e.g., reputation) resources that are subject to either loss or harm if objects of attention are damaged (Goodfriend and Agnew 2008). Satisfaction, which develops when a person's subjective experience with an issue or relationship exceeds his or her expectations of quality, increases the

benefits associated with remaining committed to a particular target of attention. Investments intensify commitments by increasing the penalties associated with exit.

The availability of quality *alternatives*, i.e. choices that challenge the status quo (Hoffman et al. 2009), on the other hand, are inversely associated with the willingness of people to commit to various goals and positions (Agnew et al. 2007; Le and Agnew 2003). As the quality of alternatives increase, the appeal of staying the course declines because the costs associated with doing something else or adopting a new attitude declines. Poor alternatives, by contrast, strengthen commitments by reducing the allure of change. In fact, the absence of either any alternatives or just good alternatives may induce individuals to maintain commitments they otherwise deem unsatisfactory (Rusbult and Martz 1995).

Experimental work addressing the "War on Terror" is consistent with the premise that the willingness to support particular foreign policies is sensitive to information about the quality of alternative courses of action. Agnew et al (2007), for example, report that mean levels of support for forceful U.S. counterterrorism efforts decline by roughly twenty percent when alternatives to the "War on Terror" are described as good instead of poor (see Table 4, 10). Everts and Isernia's (2005) analysis of national polls prior to the second Gulf War arrives at the related conclusion that support for the war increased as the viability of alternatives for dealing with Iraq declined. Yet, neither of these studies explores the consequences of withholding information about alternatives from respondents.

As we indicated above, Mueller's (1993, 81-82) analysis of national surveys administered after Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, but before fighting started in January 1991, is the one analysis we are aware of that examines the consequences of denying people information about

alternatives to the use of force. Mueller found that expressions of support for the use of force were generally lower in response to questions that mentioned economic sanctions as a method of dealing with Iraq than they were in response to questions that only asked about backing for military operations. Our analysis of polls about the use of force to counter Iran's nuclear program suggests a similar conclusion. Mean public support for the use of force against Iran was anywhere from 8 to 41 percentage points lower in response to questions mentioning diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute over Iran's nuclear program than it was in response to questions that only asked about support for military action (details of this analysis are in the appendix).

Nevertheless, there are limits to what secondary analyses of polls can tell us about the consequences of withholding information about non-war courses of action on the willingness of people to express support for military action. First, the questions that pollsters ask are not usually designed to examine how the availability of diplomatic alternatives influences support for the use of force. Instead, questions that juxtapose diplomacy and force are frequently intended to get respondents to identify the track they want the U.S. to pursue at the time the poll is administered (e.g., "In your view, of the five choices I read, what is the one best way for the United States to deal with the current situation in Iran? Use diplomacy to try to establish better relations, seek to impose international economic sanctions, threaten military action against Iran, take military action against Iran, the United States does not have to do anything to deal with the current situation in Iran"). Consequently, we cannot conclude that individuals who indicate a preference for diplomatic strategies either do not support the use of force or support the use of force less than they otherwise would if diplomacy was not an option.

Second, pollsters are divided over how to gauge support for the use of force before the U.S. engages in fighting. Mueller (1994) identified thirty different questions designed to gauge

public support for the use of force against Iraq before the first Gulf War started in 1991. Similarly, we identified twenty-eight different questions about the public's support for the use of force against Iran. Only eight of these questions were ever asked more than once and only four of the repeated questions were asked more than twice. Since even slight variations in the phrasing of conceptually similar questions can elicit different responses (Mueller 1994), the inconsistency in question wording means that it is difficult to determine with existing polling data whether changes in public attitudes about U.S. foreign policy are caused by attitude shifts or idiosyncratic lexical choices.[5]

Finally, analyses of secondary polling data cannot tell us about the effect of denying people information about alternative courses of action. Pollsters are not in the habit of withholding information about the availability of diplomatic strategies from some respondents while supplying it to others. Consequently, we do not have comparable groups of people that we can use for the purpose of drawing inferences about the effects of questions about support for the use of force that do not include cues about available diplomatic strategies.

These limitations on our knowledge are significant. Since Americans are notoriously ill-informed about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and the details of specific crises (Berinsky 2009), one might conclude that denying people information about non-war courses of action has no influence on their support for military action. What Americans do not know cannot affect their judgments. Additionally, the prospects for military victory are independent of the the

[5] Pre-war variation in the polling before the Iranian and first Gulf War cases does not appear to be unusual. Using IPOLL, we identified more than 1,000 polling questions asked between 1947 and 2010. (We used the search terms (support or favor or oppose) and (force or war) under the topic heading "war." See the appendix for the list.) This search confirmed that questions about support for the use of force are worded inconsistently and rarely repeated before conflicts begin.

prospects for diplomacy, further undercutting the idea that people's support for the use of force is tied to the absence of information about diplomacy.

On the other hand, the argument in favor of no relationship overlooks that discussions of the use of force in democracies, including the United States, take place against the backdrop of widely held beliefs about the appropriate conditions for going to war (Dixon 1994). Whether they are familiar with the Just War tradition (e.g., Crawford 2003) or utilitarian arguments that suggest low cost policies are preferable to substitutable high cost ones (Besanko and Braeutigam 2010, 52), American citizens likely believe that leaders resort to force when there are no other ways left to defend U.S. interests.

Evidence for the claim that Americans see the use of force as a tactic of last resort appears in national polls. In both October 2001 and December 2011, majorities of Americans (54% and 71% respectively) agreed with the statement that, "American military force should be used only as a last resort, after diplomatic and economic efforts have failed." Based on the statements they make, modern Presidents appear to recognize that the public expects them to use force only after trying everything else. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) argue, the demands norms make on people to behave properly is revealed in the ways they justify their actions. For Presidents, this means showing that their decisions to use force pass the tactic of last resort test. As George H. W. Bush explained upon ordering divisions of the US Air Force to Saudi Arabia shortly after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, "No [President] commits America's Armed Forces to a dangerous mission lightly, but after perhaps unparalleled international consultation and exhausting every alternative, it became necessary to take this action" (8 August 1990). Similarly, Bill Clinton announced his administration's decision to join NATO airstrikes against Serbian targets in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was made only after having "done everything we

possibly could to solve this problem peacefully" (24 March 1999). Even George W. Bush, who some accused of initiating a preventive war against Iraq, described the US as entering the war "reluctantly" and only after diplomatic efforts failed.

The implication of the claim that Americans expect Presidents to use force as a last resort is this: efforts to study war support that exclude mentions of available alternatives generate estimates of support that are premised on the idea that leaders who are contemplating military action must be out of attractive options. Thus, unlike framing effects like the "sunk cost trap" (see Boettcher and Cobb 2009) and signals of support from abroad, which must be communicated to influence public attitudes, assumptions about diplomatic alternatives influence the attitudes of survey respondents even in the absence of specific cues about diplomacy. Hence, conclusions like "success matters most" in determining war support are based on a truncated range of situations defined by the absence of either viable or appealing diplomatic alternatives to the use of force.

We can test whether people base their expressions of support for military operations on the idea that available non-war alternatives are either unavailable or unattractive experimentally by comparing the responses of three groups of respondents to questions about war support: 1) those who receive no information about diplomatic alternatives; 2) those who are told that the available diplomatic alternatives are of low quality; and 3) those who are told that available diplomatic alternatives are of high quality. We hypothesize that *if people respond to questions about military operations assuming that force is used a last resort, then there should be no discernable difference in the levels of support expressed by those who are told nothing about diplomacy and those who are told that the available diplomatic alternatives are poor*. By contrast, *when respondents are cued to the existence of quality non-war options, their support for*

these missions will decline. Cues about diplomatic alternatives to war might be irrelevant to judgments about military operations. Saying that alternatives "matter," therefore, means that informing respondents about quality diplomatic courses of action will depress their enthusiasm for military operations relative to those who are either told nothing about diplomacy or who are told that the available diplomatic alternatives are unlikely to work.

Research Design

We examine the propositions that (1) the failure to cue respondents to the existence of alternatives to military action is tantamount to telling them that the alternatives to military action are poor and that (2) cues about quality alternatives to military action reduce support for war by replicating three experiments conducted by Feaver and Gelpi (2004) and Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009). Experiment one replicates Feaver and Gelpi (2004). It focuses on the effects of success on the number of casualties subjects reported as "acceptable" in light of the operations' goals. Experiment two and three replicate experiments conducted by Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009). Experiment two examines the influence of cues about PPOs and success on expressions of support for hypothetical military operations. Experiment three examines the effects of expected casualty counts and military success on support for an unspecified military operation. Thus, the experiments we replicated allow us to examine the effects of alternatives across three different measures of war support and in the presence of different experimental treatments.

In each case, we paired a literal replication of the original experiment with modified versions in which subjects also received cues about the quality of alternative courses of action to war. For example, subjects in one of our literal replications of work by Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler

(2009) were asked "Would you say you strongly approved, somewhat approved, somewhat disapproved, or strongly disapproved of the United States taking military action to replace the government of Yemen if it were threatening the shipping of oil through the Persian Gulf?" In contrast, subjects who received our experimental treatments were also told, ". . . *and negotiations with the Yemeni government were likely [unlikely] to resolve the situation*?"

We recruited volunteers for the studies from Purdue University's undergraduate Introductory Psychology subject pool (students volunteered for a study titled "Perspectives on the Use of Military Force"). After signing up for the study, subjects were randomly assigned to one of the three studies. Participants received access to an experiment website and were allowed to complete the experiment whenever they chose from any location with Internet access. Subjects gave informed consent to participate in the studies and completed a demographic questionnaire that included items about their sex, age, and party affiliation. Upon completion of this questionnaire, subjects were randomly assigned to one of the various within-study conditions (e.g., no-alternatives (the literal replications); bad alternatives).

In all, 637 people participated in one of our three studies. Men comprised 58% of our overall sample and the average age of the participants was 21.25 (S.D. = 1.25; range = 19 to 25). Roughly 47% of participants self-identified as Republicans and approximately 28% said they were Democrats. The remainder described themselves as Independents. We controlled for these characteristics (sex, age, and party identification) in each of our experiments.

Undoubtedly, some readers may be uncomfortable with our use of college students instead of a statistically representative sample of adults. There is a well-known list of warnings about the threats to external validity associated with student samples (Sears 1986) and evidence

that it may be unwise to rely on studies that ask students to imagine themselves in unfamiliar roles (Mintz, Redd, and Vedlitz 2006). Given our objectives, however, these problems are unlikely to apply to our research. Our goal was to examine how cues about diplomacy influence decision making processes, not to estimate the size of average population effects. The judgments we are studying about diplomatic courses of action require neither specialized training nor specialized information. Every voting age person is able to offer opinions about the wisdom of war. Moreover, the age, intellectual maturity, and education of our subjects are unlikely to make them more sensitive to our prompts than other groups. On the contrary, our subjects responded to the experimental treatments as Feaver and Gelpi (2004) and Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's (2009) subjects did. The exact *magnitude* of the relationships we uncovered may not generalize to the population, but the effects themselves are unlikely to be a function of our subject population.

Study 1: The effects of alternatives on casualty sensitivity

Our first experiment replicates the work of Feaver and Gelpi (2004, see chapter 4). The original study assessed the number of casualties people considered "acceptable" in light of information about one of two PPOs: a mission to stabilize a democratic government in Congo and military strikes against suspected Iraqi nuclear facilities.[6] We extended this research by including information about alternative courses of action, producing a two (military engagement scenario: supporting democratic government in Congo vs. military strike against Iranian nuclear

[6] We changed the hypothetical target of US strikes from Iraqi to Iranian nuclear facilities because of the well-publicized absence of Iraqi WMDs. We do not believe this change is consequential. The results of our tests are consistent with the others we replicated that do not mention Iran. In addition, the effects of cues about alternatives persist in our Iran experiment even when we control for our volunteers' level of knowledge about international affairs. See the appendix for this analysis.

facilities) x three (alternatives: good, poor, no information) experimental design. The military engagement scenario was manipulated within-participant. Alternatives were manipulated between-participants with the exception that those in the no-alternatives condition never received information about substitute courses of action. Participants in the conditions involving cues about alternatives could receive any combination of good and bad alternatives information across the military engagement scenarios (e.g., good alternatives in the Congo scenario, but poor in the WMD scenario).

Prior to the manipulation, participants read a paragraph taken from Feaver and Gelpi (2004) describing the approximate number of casualties the US military suffered in previous wars (see page six for text). They then received one of the two hypothetical military scenarios. In the no-alternatives condition, subjects read the following: "Imagine for a moment that a president had to act to stabilize a democratic government in Congo. In your opinion, what would be the highest number of American military deaths that would be acceptable to stabilize a democratic government in Congo?" In each of the alternatives conditions, subjects read an additional sentence. In the good alternatives condition, subjects read, "The president decided on a military option, but was overheard saying that his decision was a difficult one because there were non-military alternatives including diplomacy or economic sanctions that might work." In the poor alternatives condition, subjects read, "The president decided on a military option and was overheard saying that his decision was an easy one because the alternatives to military action including diplomacy or economic sanctions were unlikely to work."

After receiving the manipulation, subjects reported the highest number of American military deaths that they considered acceptable to accomplish the hypothetical goal. They then completed a manipulation check to confirm that subjects understood the alternatives cue they

received. Finally, participants repeated the process described above in response to a second scenario before being debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

The responses subjects gave about the highest number of casualties they considered acceptable served as our dependent variable. Following Feaver and Gelpi (2004), we divided these responses into six categories (0 casualties; 1-50 casualties; 51-500 casualties; 501-5000 casualties; 5001-50,000 casualties; more than 50,000 casualties) and analyzed the results using ordered logit. Subjects who failed our manipulation check were removed from the analysis.

The results are consistent with the idea that people assume presidents contemplate using force when the prospects for alternative diplomatic action are poor (see Table One). Respondents who were told that there were bad alternatives to military action were indistinguishable from those in the no alternatives condition (Model 1: $b=-.05$, $p>.05$). That is, subjects who were told that diplomatic alternatives to the use of force were inadequate were roughly as insensitive to casualties as subjects who received no cues about alternatives at all.[7]

[Table 1 here]

In contrast, respondents who were told that there were good alternatives to the use of force found lower levels of casualties acceptable relative to those in the poor and no alternatives conditions (Model 1: $b=-1.11$, $p<.01$). Awareness of good alternatives, in fact, has the largest effect on casualty acceptance in our model. As Figure Two shows, below, the probability of

[7] Collapsing the dependent variable into a binary variable (expected casualties: high vs. low) does not change the results of our analysis (see the supplemental materials).

someone who received cues about good alternatives rating a given level of US casualties "acceptable" declines as the log of casualties increases. Good alternatives appear to have their biggest effect relative to the other cues in the zero to 500 casualties range. Subjects in the good alternatives treatment, for example, are more than ten percent more likely than those in the other treatments to say no (zero) US casualties are acceptable. In contrast, subjects in the bad and no-alternatives conditions were more likely than those receiving the good alternatives cue to identify more than 500 US casualties as acceptable.

[Figure 1 here]

Our results also confirm Feaver and Gelpi's (see Table 1) findings regarding PPOs. Subjects in our treatment conditions were more tolerant of casualties in the WMD scenario (Model 1: $b=.84$, $p<.01$), a foreign policy restraint mission, than the Congo scenario, which focused on internal political change. The same result emerged when we focus on those who participated only in the literal replication of Feaver and Gelpi's study (Model 2: $b=.88$, $p<.01$).

Study 2: The effects of alternatives on support for military operations in Yemen

Our second study replicates Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's (2009, see chapter 4) work regarding the relative explanatory power of (1) success and (2) PPOs on the willingness to express support for the use of force across three hypothetical military operations in Yemen. As in Study 1, we extended the original design to include information about available alternatives. The result is a three (Yemeni government scenarios: threatening oil shipments through the Persian Gulf vs. engaging in ethnic cleansing and forced slavery vs. providing terrorist bases to al Qaeda) x three (alternatives: good vs. poor vs. no information) experimental design.

The Yemeni government scenario was manipulated within-participant, whereas alternatives were manipulated between-participants. Cues about success were not manipulated in this study. Instead, subjects were asked for their subjective estimates of the probability of each mission's success. As in Study 1, participants in the no-alternatives condition never received information about diplomatic alternatives to ensure their experience mirrored that of Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's subjects. In contrast, participants in the good and bad alternatives conditions could receive any combination of good and bad alternative information across the Yemeni scenarios (e.g., a participant could read about good alternatives in the oil scenario, good alternatives in the ethnic cleansing scenario, and poor alternatives in the terrorism scenario).

The setup for each scenario was the same. In the oil shipment scenario, subjects read the following: "Would you say you strongly approved, somewhat approved, somewhat disapproved, or strongly disapproved of the United States taking military action to replace the government of Yemen if it were threatening the shipping of oil through the Persian Gulf?" In the good alternatives condition, subjects also read, "...and negotiations with the Yemeni government were likely to resolve the situation?" whereas in the poor alternatives condition subjects also read "...and negotiations with the Yemeni government were unlikely to resolve the situation?" Next, subjects were asked to rate their approval of the use of force and to estimate the number of deaths they anticipated the US military was likely to suffer in the operation (0 ("0 deaths"), 1 ("between 1 and 50 deaths"), 2 ("between 51 and 500 deaths"), 3 ("between 501 and 5000 deaths"), 4 ("between 5001 and 50000 deaths"), and 5 ("greater than 50001 deaths")). We also asked every subject in one of the manipulated conditions a question designed to check that they understood the cue they received. Participants repeated all these steps for the remaining scenarios before being debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

We used the question tapping approval for the hypothetical missions as the dependent variable and restricted our analysis to subjects who passed the manipulation check. As expected (see Table 2), those in the bad alternatives condition (Model 3: b=-.14, p>.1) are indistinct from subjects in the no-alternatives condition. On the other hand, subjects in the good alternatives treatment are less likely to support the hypothetical missions (Model 3: b=-.82, p<.01). These results hold even when we collapse the dependent variable into two categories (support and do not support) to better match the dichotomous measures of support for military action typically used in national polls (this analysis appears in the on-line appendix).

[Table 2 here]

Being told nothing about diplomatic alternatives to war engenders levels of support for military operations that are on par with messages that indicate the prospects for successful diplomacy are dim. In contrast, being told that there are good alternatives to the use of force increases the probability of disapproving of a military mission by 12%. The effect of receiving good alternatives on the predicted probability of selecting one of the approval categories appears in Figure 2. As the figure shows, subjects who received cues about good alternatives are more likely to either "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of the use of force than subjects in the bad and no-alternatives conditions. Subjects in the good alternatives condition are also less likely to either "approve" or "strongly approve" of the use of force than subjects in the bad and no-alternatives conditions.

[Figure 2 here]

Once again, subjects also appear to react to our PPO manipulation as subjects in Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's work whether they were exposed to cues about alternatives (see Model 3) or not (see Model 4). Humanitarian missions focused on ethnic cleansing (Model 3: b=-.81, p<.001; Model 4: b=-.92, p<.05) and missions designed to impose foreign policy restraint (Model 3: b=-1.92, p<.001; Model 4: b=-2.02, p<.001) received less support than missions designed to prevent al Qaeda from establishing bases of operation in Yemen. Our findings regarding expected success (Model 3: b=.80, p<.001; Model 4: b=.83, p<.05), which show it increases support for military operations, also match Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's results with the caveat that success is not the strongest predictor of support in our models. Expected casualties, however, are unrelated to support (Model 3: b=.07, p>.1; Model 4: b=.08, p>.1).

Study 3: The effects of alternatives on support for an unspecified military operation.

Our final experiment replicates a study Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009, see chapter 4) designed to examine the causal effects of (1) anticipated casualty counts and (2) expectations of success on support for a generic military operation. Unlike Studies 1 and 2, subjects were not asked to factor mission objectives into their calculi or to offer subjective estimates of the probability of success. Instead, we exerted control over the values of all of the relevant theoretical variables (i.e., success, anticipated casualties, and alternatives).

Subjects were recruited for the study using the same procedure used for Studies 1 and 2, but those assigned to this study were also asked to complete an additional questionnaire gauging their attitudes about using the American military to achieve nine possible U.S. foreign policy goals (e.g., helping to foster democracy in other countries). The list of items mirrors those used

by Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009, 75). Each of the items was scored on a four-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly agree") to 4 ("strongly disagree"). We then submitted these nine items to an exploratory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood method to extract factors. Eigenvalues of 3.88 and .44, accounting for 100% of the variance, suggested the presence of two factors.[8] Items were included on particular factors if the factor loading was greater than .40 for that dimension and less than .30 for the other. Using these criteria, five items loaded on the first "Security" factor; the remaining five items loaded on the second "Humanitarian" factor. We used a promax (oblique) rotation because the two factors were moderately correlated (r = .31).

Next, we randomly assigned subjects to one of the twenty-seven conditions generated by a three (confidence in military success: extremely vs. somewhat vs. not very) x three (estimated number of casualties: 50 vs. 500 vs. 5000) x three (alternatives: good vs. poor vs. no information) design. Each condition in this experiment was manipulated between-participants, with each subject receiving one scenario at random. As in Studies 1 and 2, participants in the no-alternatives condition never received information about alternative courses of action, but other participants could receive any combination of information in the scenario they considered (i.e., confidence, casualty counts, and alternatives were assigned randomly).

The scenario in the no-alternatives condition read as follows: "The Joint Chiefs of Staff are EXTREMELY/SOMEWHAT/NOT AT ALL CONFIDENT that the U.S. military will achieve this foreign policy goal, but estimate that FIFTY/FIVE-HUNDRED/FIVE-THOUSAND U.S. soldiers will be killed in this military action." Those in one of the alternatives condition received the following additional sentence: "The Joint Chiefs also expressed the opinion that the

[8] We kept the second factor even though its eigenvalue is below 1.00 to maintain consistency with Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's research. Details of this analysis are available from the authors.

chances of diplomatic efforts achieving this foreign policy goal were GOOD/POOR." Participants responded by rating their support for the mission on a four point scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly approve") to 4 ("strongly disapprove"). Subjects also completed a manipulation check question. Finally, we debriefed the participants and thanked them for their time.

Results

We used the four-point measure of support for the mission as the dependent variable and analyzed our data using ordered logit. Once again, we restricted our analysis to subjects who passed our manipulation check. We also confirmed that the results are substantively similar after dichotomizing the dependent variable (see the appendix for these results). The design we used for this experiment, in which we manipulated cues about alternatives, confidence of success, and expected casualties, led us to expect a conditional relationship between the three factors. Specifically, we hypothesized that war support would be strongest when subjects were told that the JCS (1) considered the alternatives to war to be *poor*, (2) were *extremely confident* that the military operation would be successful, and (3) expected the use of force would result in no more than *50* US casualties. We also expected war support to be weakest when subjects were told that the JCS (4) considered the alternatives to war to be *good*, (2) were *not very confident* that the military operation would be successful, and (3) expected the use of force would result in *501 to 5000* US casualties.

[Table 3 here]

To test this hypothesis, we generated a three-way interaction term and used it in our analysis (see Table 3, above).[9] Subjects who were told either nothing about diplomatic alternatives or that the JCS believed the alternatives to war were poor, that the JCS were extremely confident in the probability of military success, and that the JCS anticipated no more than 50 casualties were significantly more likely to support war than those who were told the JCS thought the alternatives to war were good, were not very confident in the likelihood of military success, and anticipated 501 to 5000 US casualties during the operation (Model 5: $b=1.53$, $p<.05$). That is, the condition representing the combination of factors most likely to increase war support does so relative to the condition involving the factors most likely to depress war support. (We graphed the effects of poor alternatives, extreme confidence, and low casualties on the predicted probability of expressing support for war in the appendix.)

We also found that subjects in the other conditions tended to express higher levels of support for the use of force than those whose support we expected would be lowest (Model 5: $b=1.05$, $p<.1$). These results are not simply a function of respondents' trust in the military (see Table 3, Model 6). Since our subjects received all their cues about alternatives, success, and casualties from the JCS in this experiment, we thought it important to consider the extent to which their faith in the military influenced their reactions to this information. We assessed our subjects trust in the military with the following item: "Please indicate how confident you are in the US military: Very confident, somewhat confident, not very confident, and not at all confident." As might be expected, the more our respondents trusted the institutions and leaders of the US military, the more likely they were to support the use of force (Model 6: $b=0.27$,

[9] Based on Studies 1 and 2, we collapsed the responses of subjects in the no alternatives and poor alternatives conditions to simplify the analysis.

p<.01). The effect however, does not wipe out the combined influence of cues about poor alternatives, 50 or fewer casualties, and the JCS' extreme confidence of mission success.

Finally, we found broad consistency between our results and those reported by Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler across the Security (Model 5: b=1.07, p<.01) and Humanitarian factors (Model 5: b=-0.56, p<.01), age (Model 5: b=-0.47, p<.1), sex (Model 5: b=-0.47, p<.05), education (Model 5: b=0.15, p>.1), and party identification (Model 5: b=-0.17, p<.05). This correspondence suggests that the interaction we observed between alternatives, success, and casualties is not easily dismissed as the product of a peculiar subject pool.

Discussion

Taken together, our analyses suggest that asking people about their support for military operations and casualty sensitivity without providing cues about non-war courses of action encourages them to respond as if they were told the alternatives to war are unappealing. Across three experiments, subjects who received no information about diplomatic alternatives to the use of force responded to our queries about their tolerance for casualties and support for war in similar fashion to those who heard that competing courses of action were unlikely to work. In contrast, subjects in two experiments who were informed that diplomacy could work typically reduced their enthusiasm for war and willingness to say any US casualties were "acceptable." In a third study, cues about alternatives appear to interact with information about success and anticipated casualty levels in predicted ways.

The reactions we observed to cues about quality alternatives do not appear to be an effect of newly accessible information. If the accessibility of information about diplomacy influenced

expressions of support, we would have observed differences in the responses of subjects who were told nothing about alternatives and those who were told the alternatives were unattractive. Instead, it appears that people take the absence of information about diplomatic strategies to mean that the substitutes for war are of low quality.

Our work also suggests that the effects of alternatives operate across several measures of support for the use of force. As Eichenberg (2005, 153) argues, using a single question to judge public opinion is ill-advised "because an infinite variety of question wordings on any issue is conceivable, and each is likely to yield a different set of responses" (see Berinsky and Druckman 2007, for a similar argument). The range of questions we used and scenarios we presented, therefore, implies that assumptions about alternative courses of action operate in the background of many situations in which the use of force is a possibility.

The results of our analyses also suggest two notable implications. First, when diplomatic alternatives are unavailable or unattractive, surveys of public attitudes about the use of force will accurately reflect the public's commitment to those policies. However, when quality diplomatic solutions are available, but not mentioned, people *overstate* their willingness to back military operations – even ones that promise to be successful. Under these circumstances, studies that make no mention of alternatives may generate misleading results. Of course, in the real world perceptions about available alternatives will be influenced by elite debate on the subject and the degree to which observers trust the people involved in it. Our analysis suggests that cues about alternatives still matter, controlling for trust, but a more refined control for the credibility of sources is required to check this result.

Second, our analyses suggest that over time support for the use of force can be expected to vary inversely with changes in the quality of available diplomatic alternatives. Our experiments were not designed to examine this claim, but we probed its plausibility with the data we gathered on support for the use of force against Iran. As we show in Figure 3, average support for the use of force by the U.S. military against Iran between 2003 and 2012 appears to be sensitive to information about the quality of available alternative courses of action. Although the use of force was never supported by a majority of Americans during George W. Bush's presidency (2001-2009), it is notable that a significant drop in support for military action against Iran occurs in 2007.[10] At the time, the Bush administration was seen as committed to war with Iran and pursuing diplomatic action half-heartedly. Seymour M. Hersh's article in *The New Yorker* (2006) reporting that the administration was devising an aerial bombing campaign of suspected nuclear sites in Iran helped confirm this sense. Yet, a release of the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which concluded that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 because of international pressure, undercut the argument for war. As an aide to Vice President Dick Cheney told *The Wall Street Journal*, the authors of the NIE "knew how to pull the rug out from under us" (Solomon and Gorman 2008).[11]

[Figure 3 here]

[10] Disaggregating our data shows that support for the use of force reached its lowest level in polls taken in September 2007 (9%) and September 2008 (10%). We could not find polls taken more closely to the release of the NIE in December 2007. This data limitation means that we must be careful about making causal inferences from the patterns we uncovered.

[11] In 2009, the author of the 2007 NIE, argued that the Bush administration ordered the release of pages from the NIE in order to communicate to policymakers that diplomacy remained a viable option for dealing with Iran's nuclear program (see Fingar 2009). Whether the White House either anticipated or hoped for the NIE's deflating effect on public opinion is unclear.

While public support for military operations against Iran declined during the Bush administration, it generally increased during President Barack Obama's first term (2009-2012). Obama came to office more optimistic than his predecessor about the ability of diplomacy to get Iran to give up its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Obama, for example, opened the door to direct talks with Iran over its nuclear program "without preconditions" (Borger 2009), a position George Bush rejected. Nevertheless, the inefficacy of diplomacy over during Obama's first term appears to be associated with gradual acceptance that military action might be the last viable option capable of getting Iran to change course. Paraphrasing former CIA director Michael Hayden, military action against Iran is an increasingly attractive option because "no matter what the U.S. does diplomatically, Tehran keeps pushing ahead with its suspected nuclear program" (Haaretz, 25 July 2010).

Beyond suggesting that cues about alternatives influence war support, our experiments also confirmed many of Feaver and Gelpi's (2004) and Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's (2009) findings. References to success typically increased our subjects' willingness to express support for military operations while cues about casualties typically did not. The one exception was in Study 3, where the expected number of casualties emerged as one of a number of factors that combine to influence war support.

Mission objectives also made a difference to attitudes about the use of force in the two studies that referenced these goals. In fact, varying the PPO cue had a bigger impact on our subjects than any of the other effects we examined. In Studies 1 and 2, military operations involving efforts to impose foreign policy restraint elicited more war support and greater tolerance for US casualties than either humanitarian missions or efforts to manage another country's internal political changes. In Study 1, the odds of someone expressing the ability to

tolerate US casualties were nearly seven times (6.8) greater for those who were told about a mission to eliminate Iran's nuclear weapons than for those who asked about a mission to stabilize a democratic government in Congo. In Study 2, the odds of a subject supporting a military operation were more than two times (2.23) greater for those who were told the hypothetical mission involved eliminating al Qaeda in Yemen than for those who were asked about a hypothetical mission to prevent ethnic cleansing.

We were unable, however, to reproduce all Feaver and Gelpi and Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's findings. Success, for example, is the not the most important predictor of war support across the studies we conducted and the results associated with the demographic controls are sometimes at variance with Feaver and Gelpi and Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's work. While these "missed predictions" suggest success' impact may diminish when alternatives are factored in, they are not cause for concern. The magnitudes of the relationships produced in our studies may not compare to those generated from national samples. Instead, this research is better equipped to illustrate one of the possible dynamics underlying the public's support for war.

Conclusion

In their influential work on casualties and war support, Scott Gartner and Gary Segura note that "the influence of wartime casualties on public opinion has been identified as the central tenet of democratic peace arguments" (1998, 279). Certainly this has been the operative assumption in Washington DC, where beliefs about the public's sensitivity to American casualties frequently makes Presidents cautious about the use of force. As a senior European officer involved in efforts to get US troops more involved in the Balkans conflict explained,

"The body-bag syndrome is a real problem now. It's not that the American soldier doesn't want to fight; the politicians won't let him" (Smith, Fenton, and La Guardia 2001).

Yet, there is evidence of a shift in attitudes among political elites about the public's ability to stomach casualties and willingness to support military campaigns. Encouraged by evidence that the prospect of military success enables ordinary Americans to overcome their alleged squeamishness, Presidents are increasingly touting the inevitability of US military victories to bolster public support for military operations. In doing so, Presidents and their advisors are also challenging Liberal theory's claim that the public is inherently opposed to war.

Although the research on success puts an end to the claim that the public cannot stomach war's toll on society, it is premature to read the evidence about success as supporting the claim that people will overlook these costs if doing so advances the national interest. Our work suggests people assume decisions to use force are made when all other reasonable alternatives have been exhausted. When viable options remain, the promise of military victory is unlikely to make the price of war fade. Hence, the availability of viable diplomatic solutions to foreign policy problems will tend to undermine the public's tolerance of casualties and support for military operations. On the other hand, the prospect of victory will exert its greatest influence when non-war solutions to foreign policy problems are either unavailable or inferior to military options.

While we made these points about the influence of alternative courses of action on public support for military operations using frameworks designed to test the success matters thesis, it is likely that our results also hold for elite cue theories of war support. Partisan messages about proposed military operations are communicated to a public that sees force as a last resort.

Measured levels of support based on party-based cues about uses of force are, therefore, also susceptible to the influence of background assumptions about alternatives. Information from trusted sources that suggests that non-war options remain viable is likely to deflate enthusiasm for war in similar was to the ones we observed in our work.

In the future, it may be useful to explore how denying people information about alternative courses of action influences their judgments about the use of force across a range of questions pollsters ask prior to the start of hostilities. The sensitivity of people to differences in the ways questions are worded means that it is not clear how sensitive the results we reported above are to other dependent variables. It also may be useful to consider the role alternatives play in influencing war support during violent episodes. Presidents are often forced to explain why staying the course in foreign conflicts is superior to reducing the US military's role in accomplishing particular objectives. In principle, alternatives to continued conflict should be appealing, but these chances also compete against investments that may encourage people to stay the course. The events that precede conflicts may also make diplomacy appear less credible.

In summary, beliefs about the availability of viable alternatives to the use of force appear to influence public attitudes about the wisdom of war. Policymakers appear to recognize this. As Secretary of State Colin Powell argued during the deliberations over attacking Iraq, even if war was the US' preferred outcome it could not be initiated without trying diplomacy first. Otherwise, "nobody would be with them – no Brits, no bases, no access or overflight agreements, European and Middle East allies all on the other side" (Woodward 2004, 157). The question going forward is how far can this result be pushed?

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Table 1: The effects of alternatives on casualty sensitivity

	Model 1 (with alternatives)	Model 2 (literal replication)
Good alternatives	-1.11** (0.42)	
Bad alternatives	-0.05 (0.41)	
WMD scenario	0.84*** (0.19)	0.88** (0.33)
Age	0.51* (0.21)	0.43 (0.37)
Education	-0.88*** (0.22)	-0.86** (0.33)
Sex	0.21 (0.33)	0.45 (0.49)
Cut 1 constant	-3.01 (3.02)	
Cut 2 constant	-2.47 (2.99)	-4.52 (5.28)
Cut 3 constant	-1.63 (2.97)	-3.78 (5.21)
Cut 4 constant	0.06 (2.93)	-2.73 (5.14)
Cut 5 constant	0.97 (2.93)	0.97 (5.04)
Pseudo-R^2	0.05	0.05
N	202	82

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; Std. errors in ().

Table 2: The effects of alternatives on support for the use of force in Yemen

	Model 3 (with alternatives)	Model 4 (literal replication)
Good alternatives	-0.82**	
	(0.28)	
Bad alternatives	-0.14	
	(0.24)	
Expected casualties	0.07	0.08
	(0.14)	(.2498397)
Success	0.80***	0.83*
	(0.19)	(0.35)
Humanitarian Mission	-0.81***	-0.92*
	(0.22)	(0.38)
Foreign pol. restraint	-1.92***	-2.02***
	(0.24)	(0.42)
Age	-0.13	-0.13
	(0.20)	(0.31)
Education	0.08	-0.28
	(0.26)	(0.50)
Party ID	-0.20*	-0.18
	(0.09)	(0.12)
Sex	-0.46*	-0.78
	(0.23)	(0.45)
Cut 1 constant	-7.11	-12.54
	(1.86)	(3.39)
Cut 2 constant	-5.39	-10.58
	(1.84)	(3.30)
Cut 3 constant	-3.39	-8.37
	(1.80)	(3.20)
Pseudo-R^2	0.11	0.13
N	427	156

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; Std. errors in ().

Table 3: Effects of success, casualties, and alternatives on war support.

	Model 5	Model 6
Poor alternatives, JCS extremely confident, 0-50 casualties	1.53*	1.55*
	0.69	0.69
Middling experimental treatments	1.05†	1.03†
	0.60	0.60
Security orientation	1.07***	1.00***
	0.15	0.15
Humanitarian orientation	-0.56***	-0.54**
	0.16	0.16
Party ID	-0.17*	-0.17†
	0.09	0.09
Age	0.07	0.12
	0.79	0.81
Education	0.15	0.14
	0.12	0.12
Sex	-0.47*	-0.43*
	0.20	0.20
Trust in military		-0.31*
		0.12
Cut 1 constant	0.21	-0.29
	1.51	1.53
Cut 2 constant	2.35	1.86
	1.51	1.53
Cut 3 constant	5.02**	4.56***
	1.53	1.54
Pseudo R^2	0.08	0.08
N	404	401

†p<.1; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; Std. errors in ().

Figure 1: Probability Subjects Deem Casualty Categories "Acceptable" with Different Alternatives Treatments

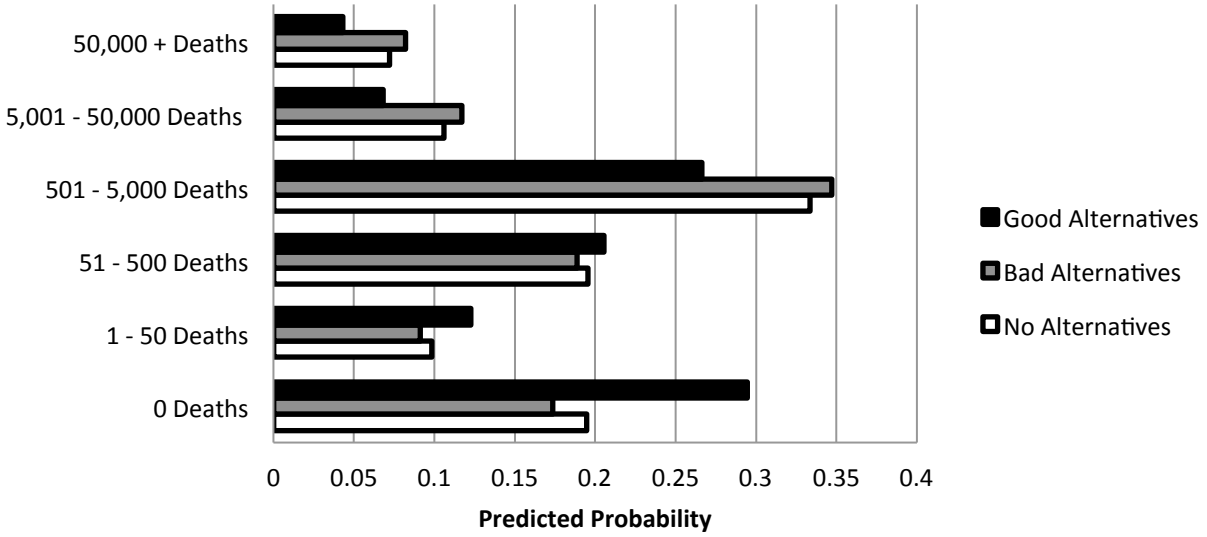

Figure 2: Probability Subjects Express Approval or Disapproval of War After Exposure to Different Alternatives Treatments

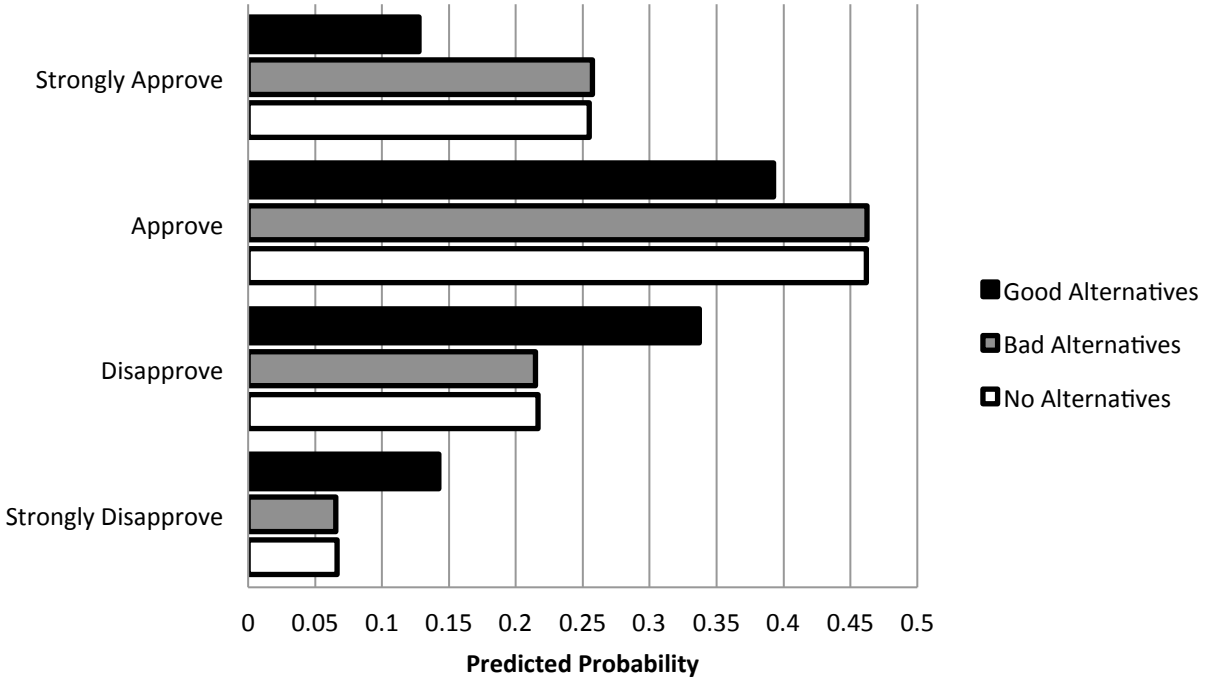

Figure 3: Mean opposition & support for use of force against Iran, 2003-2012