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Richard Ned Lebow

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National Identities and International Relations

Identity is the master variable for many constructivist scholars of international politics. In this comparative study, Richard Ned Lebow shows that states do not have identities any more than people do. Leaders, peoples, and foreign actors seek to impose national identifications consistent with their political projects and psychological needs. These identifications are multiple, fluid, and rise in importance as a function of priming and context. Leaders are at least as likely to invoke national identifications as rationalizations for policies pursued for other reasons as they are to be influenced by them. National identifications are nevertheless important because they invariably stress the alleged uniqueness of a people and its country, and are a principal means of seeking status and building self-esteem. Lebow tracks the relative appeal of these principles, the ways in which they are constructed, how they influence national identifications, and how they in turn affect regional and international practices.

RICHARD NED LEBOW is Professor of International Political Theory at the War Studies Department of King's College London, Bye-Fellow of Pembroke College, University of Cambridge, and James O. Freedman Presidential Professor, Emeritus, of Dartmouth College. He is author, coauthor, or editor of thirty-four books. His research is multidisciplinary and bridges international relations, psychology, history, classics, philosophy, and philosophy of science.

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*To Carol
Who has waited patiently for an unshared dedication*

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Preface and Acknowledgments

When writing *The Politics and Ethics of Identity* (Cambridge 2012), I expected to begin with individual identity and bridge to collective and national ones. I never got beyond the collective level, and certainly did not address it in any comprehensive way. It seemed appropriate, even necessary, to produce a follow-on volume that would focus on national identities and their implications for foreign policy and international relations. This study builds on the arguments of my earlier book but does more than simply extend them to national and international societies. I explore the similarities and differences – there are plenty of both – between the construction and consequences of individual and national identities. I use my analysis to offer a critique of how identity is used by many constructivists and suggest ways in which the relationship between national identifications, foreign policy, and international relations might be studied more productively.

I rounded up the usual suspects to read draft chapters. In this connection, I am indebted to Felix Berenskoetter, Carol Bohmer, Markus Kornprobst, Andrew Lawrence, David Lebow, Katherine Lebow, and Dorothy Noyes. I wrote the first draft while serving as Olof Palme Visiting Professor at Lund University. I am grateful to colleagues there, most notably Jens Bartelson and Caterina Kinvall, for their support and to the Swedish National Research Council for funding. I finished the manuscript in London, and want to thank my colleagues at King's College London and Pembroke College, University of Cambridge, for their companionship and intellectual stimulation. This is my sixth book since 2003 with Cambridge University Press, and I am once again indebted to my editor John Haslam and the staff of the Press for their support and professionalism.