WHY NATIONS FIGHT

Four generic motives have historically led states to initiate war: fear, interest, standing, and revenge. Using an original data set, Richard Ned Lebow examines the distribution of wars across three and a half centuries and argues that, contrary to conventional wisdom, only a minority of these were motivated by security or material interest. Instead, the majority are the result of a quest for standing, and for revenge – an attempt to get even with states who had previously made successful territorial grabs. Lebow maintains that today none of these motives are effectively served by war – it is increasingly counterproductive – and that there is growing recognition of this political reality. His analysis allows for more fine-grained and persuasive forecasts about the future of war as well as highlighting areas of uncertainty.

RICHARD NED LEBOW is James O. Freedman Presidential Professor at Dartmouth College and Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is the author of, among other books, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, 2008) which won the 2009 American Political Science Association Jervis and Schroeder Award for the Best Book on International History and Politics as well as the British International Studies Association Susan Strange Book Award for the Best Book of the Year, and *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (Cambridge, 2003) which won the 2005 Alexander L George Book Award of the International Society for Political Psychology.

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Past and Future Motives for War

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To the memory of three friends and collaborators

Alexander L. George (1920–2006)
Gregory Henderson (1922–1980)
Alexander Stephan (1946–2009)

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

War was a defining feature of the twentieth century. A vast percentage of the people of the last century were participants or victims in one way or another of the endless stream of civil and interstate wars that characterized this era. These wars and their consequences were accompanied by unprecedented levels of ethnic cleansing and genocide. I am just old enough to remember World War II, which had a profound impact on my choice of career, discipline and research agenda. I have authored numerous books and articles on various aspects of conflict management and resolution. I have written about intelligence failures and bad crisis management responsible for wars. More recently, in *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, I use the origins and dynamics of ancient and modern wars to elaborate and evaluate a broader set of arguments about systematic variation in the propensity and character of cooperation, conflict and risk-taking. In this book, I turn to war itself, with the goal of analyzing its causes in the past and the likelihood that they will diminish as motives for war in the future.

In 2009, when I wrote *Why Nations Fight*, I was James O. Freedman Presidential Professor of Government at Dartmouth College and Centennial Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. I want to thank colleagues at both institutions with whom I discussed the premise and arguments of the book and from whom I received useful feedback on the manuscript. They include Stephen Brooks, Christopher Coker, Michael Cox, Daryl Press, Benjamin Valentino, Odd Arne Westad and William Wohlforth. Ben Valentino helped me prepare a list of wars fought since 1945, and, in conjunction with a co-authored critique of power transition, measured the respective power of rising and great powers since 1945.[1]

[1] Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino, "Lost in Transition: A Critique of Power Transition Theories," *International Relations*, 23, no. 3 (September 2009), pp. 389–410.

David Lebow, Rajan Menon and two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press read the manuscript and provided helpful criticism and suggestions. As with two of my previous books, the John Sloan Dickey Center at Dartmouth College hosted seminars to review chapters. My presidential fellows at Dartmouthy, Reyad Allie and Josh Rosselman, did yeoman's service checking facts and proofreading. Ken Booth and his colleagues at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, invited me to present the core argument of my book as the 2009–2010 E. H. Carr Lecture and provided thoughtful feedback. For the same reason, thanks go to Rick Herrmann and the Mershon Center, Felix Berenskoetter and the School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS) and Brendan Sims and the Centre of International Studies, University of Cambridge. Once again, I express my gratitude to John Haslam, my editor and collaborator on three books. Finally and foremost, thanks to Carol Bohmer for putting up with all too many "could we do this later, I'm working on my book."