

GAMBLING AND WAR

Risk, Reward, and Chance in International Conflict

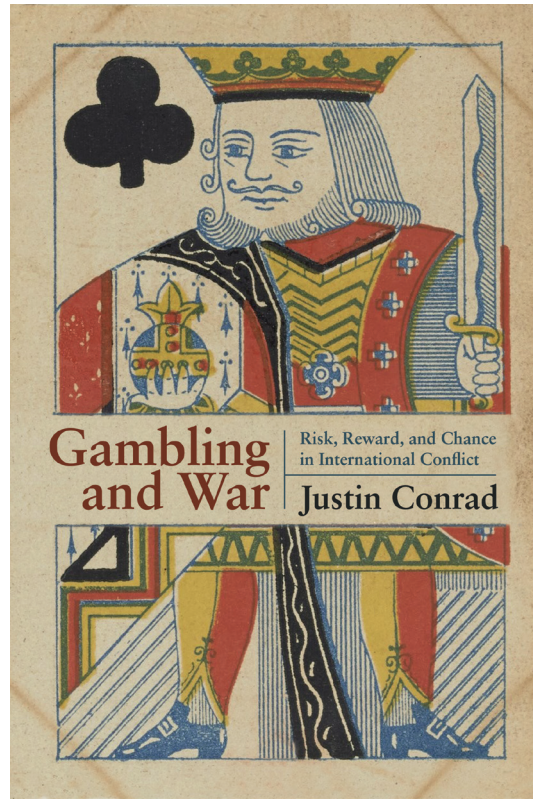
By Justin Conrad

In 1914, as Germany mobilized for war, Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg remarked to the country's legislators, "If the iron dice must roll, then God help us." War has often been compared to a game of dice or a lottery. But just as frequently, war has been compared to a game of pure strategy like chess. In reality, the business of negotiating with adversaries, fighting wars, and ending wars is far more complicated than a game of chess, where each player can see all the pieces on the board and knows the possible moves that they can make. War is far more chaotic and unpredictable. And yet, international bargaining and international conflict is not a simple dice game either, where human beings have no control over the outcome.

Justin Conrad bets that war is more like a game of poker. *Gambling and War: Risk, Reward, and Chance in International Conflict* brings readers a war college course taught at a Las Vegas casino. To succeed in poker, it is not enough to simply anticipate the actions of other players and try to outsmart them. A successful player must also understand and appreciate the role of randomness. Additionally, players must confront the reality that all human beings are prone to errors in judgment, which cause them to make suboptimal choices under many circumstances. Taken together, these challenges make poker a fascinating and highly unpredictable game, much like the challenges of international conflicts.

Gambling and War applies lessons learned from poker, blackjack, roulette, and other games of chance to the study of international conflict. Drawing on scholarly insights from a variety of fields, including probability, statistics, political science, psychology, and economics, Conrad offers thoughts on how we can better manage and prevent international conflict, the costliest game of all.

JUSTIN CONRAD, PhD, is associate professor of political science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Dr. Conrad has published studies on international conflict and terrorism in leading academic journals. He is also an officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve and a terrible poker player.



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