



Declaring War in Early Modern Europe

Frederic J., Prof. Baumgartner

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A noteworthy development in recent history has been the disappearance of formal declarations of war. Many Americans argue that the result of this development has been to abrogate the US Constitution, which delegates the authority to declare war to the Congress. This book examines the history of declaring war in the early modern era up to the time when the Constitution was written in order to understand what the framers of the Constitution had in mind when they gave the power to declare war to Congress. In the late middle ages, formal declarations of war were highly ritualistic acts, but by the early seventeenth century, they had changed into a practice whereby an ambassador presented a printed declaration to an enemy king. Key issues include determining how and when the medieval practices of declaring war gave way to the more modern ones, and the extent to which American framers accepted or rejected the practice of their era. While the debate over recent congressional resolutions authorizing use of the armed forces overseas has generated many publications, the wider history of declaring war has been far less a topic of study, and the early modern era has been all but ignored. This book's primary sources include ambassadorial reports, especially those from Venetian ambassadors, declarations of war, published works by noted contemporary thinkers, and several early modern literary works that depict the high drama of declaring war.

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