HARVARD Kennedy School
BELFER CENTER

50 YEARS OF RESEARCH, POLICY, AND LEADERSHIP

Applied History Project Newsletter

April 2025

The April 2025 issue of the Applied History Network Newsletter spotlights member-contributed news items for more than 500 leaders in the Applied History movement across 50 institutions.

This newsletter is prepared by the Applied History Project at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center and edited by Jason Walter and Ivana Hoàng Giang. Past editions of the newsletter can be accessed on the Resources page of the Applied History Project website.

If you would like to submit an item for next month's issue, please email it to igiang@hks.harvard.edu with the subject "May Applied History Update" before Monday, June 9.

Special Announcements

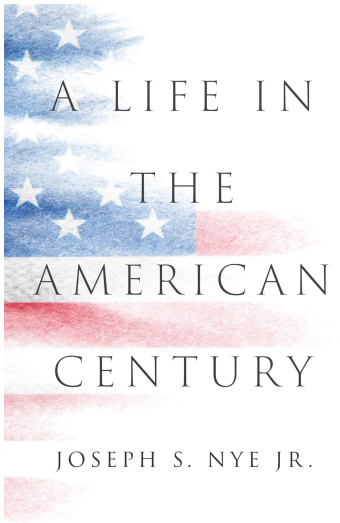
Belfer Center's Applied History Project Seeks Applications for Research Assistant

The Research Assistant will work for **Graham Allison** (Professor of Government, Harvard Kennedy School; Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project) and will be responsible for organizing Applied History Project initiatives, such as seminars for the Ernest May Fellows in History and Policy, regular sessions of the Applied History Working Group, and the Applied History Network Newsletter. The Research

Assistant will also work closely with other members of a small research team and play a key role in conducting research on specific international security topics, contributing to internal and external publications, and planning for high-level events. More information can be found here.

Latest History Books Illuminating Today's Headline Challenges and Choices*

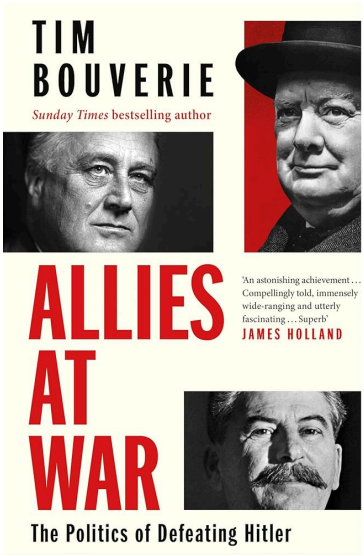
Nye Memoir Captured a Life in Full—and in History



In his 14th and final book, *A Life in the American Century*, published in 2024, **Joseph S. Nye, Jr.** (scholar, strategist, public servant, and leader) traced his personal, intellectual, and professional journey through the past eight decades of American ascendance. As **Fen Osler Hampson** (Chancellor's Professor and Professor of International Relations, Carleton University) wrote in the *Montréal Review* , Nye's story began with the fundamental values instilled by his family during his early years on their New Jersey farm. Among the subsequent highlights: Nye's time as a student during the Vietnam War; his development of the concept of soft power, "a term that is now part of the standard lexicon of diplomacy;" his contributions as a senior government official in curbing the proliferation of nuclear weapons; his leadership role in the expansion of the Harvard Kennedy School; and his continuing stature as a sought-after policy adviser. Hampson states that conceptually the book is "an important story about the genesis of ideas, the role intellectuals can play in the public discourse of a nation, and perhaps more importantly, how they play that role through key networks of power and influence." In concluding, he emphasizes Nye's "profound misgivings about the state of America today 'and what it could do to [America's] soft power.' The chaotic and deeply divisive state of American politics is a stark reminder that a country's soft power is mutable and easily squandered. Today, America's global reputation and influence hang in the balance as it turns destructively inward to fight its cultural and identity wars and other political demons." Nye also published one of

his last *Project Syndicate* columns in April, tackling the question: “What is ‘world order,’ and how is it maintained or disrupted?”

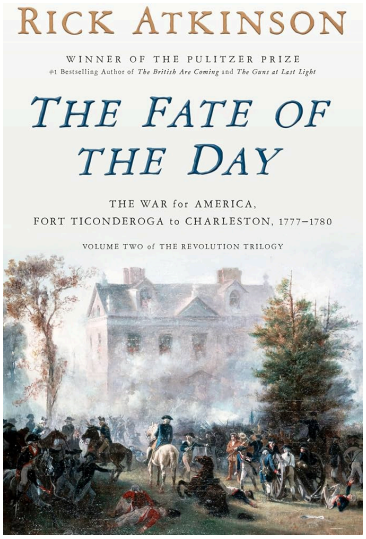
Bouverie Examines the Fraught Diplomacy that Yielded Military Victory



Allies at War: The Politics of Defeating Hitler by **Tim Bouverie** (historian and journalist) is “an ambitiously all-encompassing study of the diplomatic relations between the United States, the British Empire, the Soviet Union, the Free French and Nationalist China during the Second World War.” In the author’s words, “‘Their collaboration was sophisticated, diverse, mighty and conquering. Yet it was also fractious, suspicious, duplicitous, and rivalrous.’” In his review in *The Telegraph*, **Andrew Roberts** (Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Stanford’s Hoover Institution) writes that although Bouverie “rightly concentrates on the decision-making” of Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin, he widens the lens, describing “the much less familiar struggles going on elsewhere,” including the complications related to Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist China and the conflict between Britain and Vichy France from June 1940 until November 1942, “which constantly feed back into the narrative of the Big Three’s interaction.” These and a myriad of other issues—the Iraqi revolt of May-June 1941; Allied relations with Franco’s Spain and neutral Ireland; and how to deal with liberated Italy and Yugoslavia, among them—“needed to be discussed between the Allies, and some led to stresses and strains that were hammered out in very different ways,” especially as power began to shift from Britain and the empire toward the United States and Russia. The book is enriched by Bouverie’s research “from 100 private collections, those of foreign ministers, ambassadors, civil servants, emissaries, translators and observers,” and he “presents his new evidence from these fresh sources in an agreeably witty style, with vivid pen-portraits of the various eccentric figures that diplomacy tends to throw up, especially in wartime.” Bouverie’s analysis of the fraught Allied relationships that found direction and, ultimately, victory points to the magnitude of the challenge they confronted, “‘Only Hitler could have brought them together’…. Anything less than the simultaneous threat that Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan and (to a much lesser extent) Fascist Italy posed to rest of the world could not have kept the fissiparous alliance in one piece.” Concluding with a question relevant for Applied Historians, Roberts asks whether at a time when

some leaders “seem actively to be encouraging the fracturing of the assumptions that have kept the peace between the Great Powers for 80 years, can even today’s threat, posed by communist China, imperialist Russia, theocratic Iran and neo-feudal North Korea, keep the Western alliance together?”

Atkinson Illuminates Three Crucial Years in the American Revolution



The Fate of the Day: The War for America, Fort Ticonderoga to Charleston, 1777-1780, the second of three planned volumes on the American Revolution by **Rick Atkinson** (author and journalist), chronicles an often-overlooked period of the war, beginning with the Saratoga and Philadelphia campaigns of 1777 and ending with the opening of England’s southern strategy in 1780. As **Jerry Lenaburg** (project manager and military analyst) writes in the *New York Journal of Books* , “Beyond covering the major events and battles, Atkinson shows insightful analysis of the strategy and operational capabilities of the American revolutionaries and their English opponents.” Evaluating George Washington’s military leadership, Atkinson argues that although weak in tactics and operations, strategically, Washington was “the best choice to keep the Continental Army in the field at many critical points of these middle years of the war.” Further, in a recurring lesson of Applied History, Atkinson shows that “although the British often bested the colonists on the battlefield, they lost the most critical battle, the struggle for political control of the population…. The colonists quickly assumed political mastery of the majority of the population, establishing their own government that could raise militias, collect taxes, and ensure the loyalty of the population to their cause.” He also portrays the “tremendous growing pains” the colonists experienced in the alliance with France as the new allies “disagreed on strategy and objectives.” The book builds to a looming economic crisis for the colonists, “prompted by severe inflation and the effects of the British blockade,” and the British decision to stir Loyalist support in the Carolinas and Georgia, beginning the final phase of the war. Commenting on the three-year focus of this volume, Lenaburg concludes, “this was the crucial part of the conflict when the American nation stood for independence.”

**The inspiration for this section of the Applied History Network Newsletter, currently written by Anne Karalekas, comes from Paul Kennedy. In an email chain triggered by his review in the* Wall Street Journal *of Nicholas Mulder's* Economic Weapon*, he wrote, "I must confess that I enjoy doing these 'history that illuminates the present' book reviews for the general reader and international businessman. They are rather different in nature from the more scholarly pieces I would do in, say,* The International History Review*." He went on to explain: "For many years, when I was still at the University of East Anglia in the U.K., I was one of the two main anonymous [!] book reviewers of all books in history and politics for* The Economist *. Although it was tough going because you didn't know what was the next book that arrived in your mail, it was incredibly challenging. 'Your task,' the book review editor demanded, 'is to explain in not more than 650 words to an IBM executive flying from Boston to Atlanta why a new biography of Bismarck is worthwhile—or not.'"*

Publications of Note

Ferguson Critiques Trump's Tariff Policies in *The Free Press*

Trump's "Liberation Day" tariffs, **Niall Ferguson** (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) observes , serve to break up "The American empire that came into existence after the failed autarky and isolationism in the 1930s." Drawing comparisons between American trade policy today and "the post-1945 British Labour governments," Ferguson writes that Trump also "wants to shelter domestic manufacturing and the working class behind tariffs while reducing overseas commitments." Yet what both got wrong was failing to acknowledge that "the net result will be both economically damaging and geopolitically weakening." Ultimately, he concludes, the effect of this "wild decolonization project" and the Trump administration's levying of tariffs at a higher rate than those of the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Act—"which most economic historians blame for making the Great Depression worse"—is to leave the US and its workers worse off and empower its adversaries, Russia and China, instead.

Sarotte Explores Origins of Ukraine War in *Foreign Affairs* Review of *Hubris*

In a review of **Jonathan Haslam's** (Professor Emeritus in History of International Relations, University of Cambridge) new book *Hubris: The American Origins of Russia's War Against Ukraine*, **Mary Sarotte** (Visiting Fellow, Harvard's Applied History Project; Distinguished Professor of Historical Studies, Johns Hopkins SAIS) rejects his central thesis about culpability in the Ukraine War. Given the disputed narratives, Sarotte argues that "with so much at stake, it's crucial to get this history right." She argues that Hubris "ignores existing scholarship" and omits relevant evidence in asserting that "The fault here lies with the United States." By claiming "it is a 'fact' that 'the Russians were promised authoritatively that NATO would not expand to the East,'" Sarotte writes, "Haslam inaccurately characterizes U.S. foreign policy from the era of President George H. W. Bush to that of his son, President George W. Bush." While she acknowledges the validity of Haslam's argument that past US foreign policy is marked by instances of hubris, at the end of the day, "responsibility for the horror that has unfolded in Ukraine does not rest with Washington or Kyiv," and "to assign blame elsewhere is to absolve the guilty party in this war—Russia."

Mitter Consults Qing History to Imagine a Peaceful China in 2040 for *Foreign Affairs*

Rana Mitter (Professor of US-Asia Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) observes in a recent article that "If you dropped in to China at any point in its modern history and tried to project 20 years into the future, you would almost certainly end up getting it wrong." Instead of imagining that tensions will necessarily deepen, as most analysts do, Mitter consults Qing history "to understand where China might be going." As he writes, "When the Qing dynasty… had to grapple with European imperial powers… prominent officials crafted two slogans that defined how China should deal with the Western challenge, *fuguo qiangbing*, or 'rich country and strong army,' and *zhongti xiyong,* or 'Chinese for essence, Western for usage.'" If China avoids "major military conflagrations" and "mercantilist economics," Mitter believes it may be able to achieve those Qing paired aspirations—selling an "attractive vision" of itself as a global leader with a powerful Confucian ideology of "authoritarian welfarism," the promise of economic stability and success, and leadership in technology. The observation that "the least reliable way to predict what China will look like in 20 years

has always been to extrapolate in a straight line from where it is now" inspires Mitter to imagine a "more moderate, but still authoritarian" China, which in 2040 "looks like the creator of a peaceful world order."

Sargent Corrects Record on Constructing Today's International System in *Engelsberg Ideas*

In an essay originally commissioned for the UK government by King's College London's Applied History endeavor, **Daniel Sargent** (Professor of History and Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley) observes that commentators frequently misconstrue the nature—and history—of today's international system. Despite what many think, "International order rarely emerges from singular acts of creation; it results from continuous improvisation, adaptation, and renewal." Even during the Cold War, "The Pax Americana was never stable; it experienced constant reinvention." American security guarantees given in the 1940s were hollowed out by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and ICBMs in the 1950s. American allies like the UK and France carved out areas of fierce autonomy, despite participating in NATO's collective security system. And divides at home from the 1960s through the 1980s "remind us that durable American internationalism remained, in many ways, an improbable proposition." Understanding that the international order evolved in "fits and starts" leads to lessons for leaders today: "Don't dismiss Donald Trump as a freak of history…. Don't mourn the crumbling of a comprehensive global architecture…" and remember that "diplomacy's greatest achievement is improvising practical solutions to real problems."

Walt Finds Historical Examples of "How to Ruin a Country" in *Foreign Policy*

In the first step of a guide from history, **Stephen M. Walt** (Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) argues that "If you want to ruin a country, you should start by making sure that nobody can stop you from doing dumb and damaging things." He points to examples in which "Lack of opposition helped Joseph Stalin mismanage the Soviet economy, allowed Mao Zedong to launch the disastrous 'Great Leap Forward,' and made it possible for Adolf Hitler to declare war on the rest of Europe," as well as the fact that "Lack of strong internal dissent helped

Bush blunder into Iraq in 2003." Step two, Walt writes, is to "Pick fights with as many states as possible," such as in "Wilhelmine Germany, the Soviet Union, Maoist China, Libya, and Iraq under Saddam Hussein," which "all adopted bellicose and threatening behavior that encouraged their neighbors and others to join forces against them." Another truism: "States that acquire a reputation for being chronic rule-breakers—like North Korea or Iraq under Hussein—will be seen as dangerous and are likely to be ostracized or contained." Taken together, examples from autocracies from past to present underlie Walt's warning that the Trump administration's current "errors will make America poorer, less powerful, less respected, and less influential around the world." Walt discussed this article further on the *Background Briefing with Ian Masters* show.

Mitchell Marks "The Return of Great-Power Diplomacy" in *Foreign Affairs*

Since the 1990s, **A. Wess Mitchell** (Visiting Scholar, Harvard's Applied History Project; Principal and Co-Founder, The Marathon Initiative) writes , "Washington was so powerful that it could achieve its aims without old-fashioned diplomacy." Yet today's contested international order has created a need to revive this practice. Highlighting how diplomacy has effectively been wielded in the past—by Sparta before its war with Athens, Rome when threatened by barbarians, and England before World War I—he defines "the core purpose of strategic diplomacy" as "cultivating favorable balances of power in critical regions." In cases where leaders instead focused on removing the sources of conflict or transforming an adversary, Mitchell argues, they set the stage for their own decline. What should the US then do to counter Russian and Chinese aggression? As our military "is not postured or equipped to fight wars against two major rivals at the same time," Mitchell's answer is that "Washington will have to return to strategic diplomacy"—striking deals with Russia and Iran to focus on the threat posed by China.

Spohr Debunks Putin's NATO Narrative in *MSNBC Daily*

In a recent article, **Kristina Spohr** (Professor of International History, Johns Hopkins SAIS) writes that the Russian narrative of NATO's supposedly broken promise "'not one inch eastward'" is rooted in historical distortion. Spohr emphasizes that claims

around these words from US Secretary of State James Baker in 1990 are “spurious,” explaining: “Many of those who have latched on to this phrase are oblivious to the context.” Rather than a commitment against NATO enlargement, Baker’s statement referred specifically to German reunification talks, and the phrase was not, in fact, echoed by President George H.W. Bush. Spohr stresses that Vladimir Putin misuses this “false notion of the West’s ‘broken promises’ in his propaganda campaign” throughout Eastern Europe. She cautions against simplistic interpretations that erase the agency of Eastern European nations after the Cold War, underscoring how the Helsinki Final Act affirmed each state’s freedom to choose its alliances—a principle the Soviet Union had accepted at the time. For Spohr, understanding the complexity of Cold War diplomacy is critical to assessing Putin’s justifications for Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Plokhii Illustrates How Diverging Post-Soviet Development Led to Conflict between Russia and Ukraine in *Journal of Democracy*

To understand the war between Russia and Ukraine, **Serhii Plokhii** (Professor of Ukrainian History, Harvard University) argues that one must first understand the histories of their political systems. Russia’s experiment with democracy after the fall of the Soviet Union lasted barely two years—“Saved from the fire of Soviet tanks in August 1991, it was all but destroyed by Russian tanks in October 1993.” Boris Yeltsin’s concentration of power in the presidency in the early 1990s was ultimately continued by Vladimir Putin as he turned the country into an autocracy. But while “The Gorbachev-era democratic experiment died in Russia… it survived in the former USSR’s second-largest republic, Ukraine.” This positive example of democracy in a formerly Soviet state “posed a major threat to the Russian political regime,” empowering Russian opposition parties and complicating attempts to justify illiberal rule at home. As the 21st century continued and Ukraine leaned toward deeper integration with Europe, Plokhii writes, Putin found the threat of a democratic Ukraine enmeshed in European economic and security systems unacceptable—leading to his invasion in February 2022.

Rosen Calls for 21st Century “Strong Shield, Swift Sword” Based in the Western Hemisphere in *Foreign Affairs*

Stephen Rosen (Professor of National Security and Military Affairs, Harvard University) argues that the Cold War architecture of US bases ringing Eurasia no longer matches today's strategic landscape. Europe and Japan's combined share of world GDP has fallen by half since 1990, he observes, while precision strike drones and missiles now place every fixed US installation on an adversary's doorstep under threat. Instead of moralizing about grateful or ungrateful allies, Rosen urges Washington to rebuild Eisenhower's 1950s "New Look" policy on modern foundations: a "hemispheric shield" that hardens the continental United States—and low earth orbit—against nuclear, cyber, and cruise missile attack, paired with a "swift sword" of long range bombers, submarines, and space based intelligence and surveillance to be able to hit targets worldwide. Rosen reminds readers that "Discussions of U.S. defense posture should begin by asking not who is virtuous but what does the world look like now and what will it look like in the future." With this in mind, a posture built 75 years ago to guard wealthy allies on the enemy's frontier is now a liability. Defending the US in an era of AI, cheap launch, and ubiquitous precision weapons requires investment in the home front first and foremost, he concludes, with priority given to far-flung frontiers only when they threaten our vital national interests.

Mansoor Investigates "When Trade Wars Become Shooting Wars" for Hoover Institution

In an article for the Military History in Contemporary Conflict Working Group at Stanford's Hoover Institution, **Peter R. Mansoor** (Professor and Chair of Military History, Ohio State University) cites the 17th- and 18th-century Anglo-Dutch Wars and the 19th-century Opium Wars as historical examples of "when trade disputes ended up in hostilities." Mansoor argues that "perhaps the most infamous case was the series of economic embargoes placed on Japan" by Franklin D. Roosevelt ahead of the outbreak of WWII's Pacific theater. Responding to Japanese occupation in French Indochina, Roosevelt first embargoed sales of scrap iron, steel, and aviation fuel, then froze Japanese assets and cut off access to US oil. "Japan could not long survive as an industrialized nation without imported oil, most of which at the time came from the United States," Mansoor explains. "Japan could either give in to U.S. demands or go to war to seize by force the resources its economy needed to survive. Japanese leaders chose war." He asserts that today, "Unlike Japan in 1941, China has other options for both needed imports and other markets for its exports," and therefore it "is unlikely that President Xi will retaliate against Trump's tariffs with force." However, "like the Anglo-Dutch wars in the early modern period, the trade war

between the United States and China will be economically painful and is likely to last for years to come."

Burns Opines "There's a Method to Trump's Tariff Madness" for *The New York Times*

Jennifer Burns (Associate Professor of History, Stanford University) argues that "If the world envisioned by the Mar-a-Lago Accords comes to pass, it will be a sign that not only our currency but also our nation has been devalued." The dollar became the world's reserve currency and grew strong after the Second World War, "when the United States committed to supporting a web of economic and military alliances intended to stave off conflict and ensure peace through trade." While the Trump administration's idea to devalue the dollar does have an historical precedent in the Plaza Accord of 1985—which "reduced trade deficits, as it was intended to do," although "the basic trends continued"—today, "the Mar-a-Lago Accord tries to reverse history." The difference between then and now? "Unlike in 1985, large numbers of U.S. dollars today are held by China," Burns observes. "Lowering their value would amount to financial warfare with China." The analogy leads her to comparative consequences: "Much as the Cold War arms race with the Soviet Union squeezed the Communist system to the point of collapse, this strategy seeks to cut off China from the world economy through punishing tariffs or a user fee on reserves." During the Cold War, however, that pressure on the Soviet Union also risked nuclear MAD, and policymakers may be best advised to avoid an analogous strategy that seeks to squeeze China today.

Blas Addresses Rare Earth Hype in *Bloomberg*

In a recent op-ed, **Javier Blas** (opinion columnist, *Bloomberg*) explores the current hype surrounding the rare earth panic in the US national security establishment. He highlights earlier episodes from history, including the 1950s scare over mercury used in radios and the 1980s-era fears of mineral shortages undermining Cold War efforts, and examines how the US managed to address these issues. Blas argues that "time and time again, they assume that US companies won't innovate their way out of a mineral headache. However, that's exactly what engineers did every time." Batteries, for example, have "constantly changed, from mercury in the 1950s to an

overreliance on cobalt in the early 2000s to new formulas today using other metals." Blas's analysis gives readers a reality check: "Let's hope cooler heads prevail, letting the invisible hand of the market cure the headache; because the critical minerals issue is just that – a headache."

Lake Draws Parallels between Opium Wars and Today's Fentanyl Crisis in *The Free Press*

Commenting on the escalating trade war between the US and China, **Eli Lake** (Host, Breaking History) argues that "To see how bad could this trade war get, it's worth looking back 185 years to the last time that the world's most populous country clashed with the world's richest." Focusing on the Opium Wars between the British and Chinese empires, Lake reminds readers that conflict can be traced back to British desire to increase access to the Chinese market, when unsuccessful attempts to expand legal trade led the British East India Company to capitalize on the illegal shipment of opium from India to China through third parties. In addition to causing the societal problem of mass addiction, "it was also an economic crisis…. Now silver was not flowing into China, but instead out of the country and into the coffers of the East India Company." The Chinese Emperor decided to ban opium, disputes between local Chinese and British officials about enforcement escalated, and in 1839, the First Opium War began. In concluding Lake turns to the present, writing that "There is an echo in America's fentanyl crisis today, albeit in reverse: China makes the precursor chemicals that Mexican smugglers turn into the opium of the 21st century." As trade tensions rise, observers are left to wonder which role the US is emulating—the rising British or the falling Chinese.

Interviews and Speeches

Logevall Underscores Lessons from Vietnam on 50th Anniversary of War's End for Ford Presidential Library

Invited to speak on “The Vietnam War After Fifty Years: How to Think About Its Legacy and Meaning” at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, **Fredrik Logevall** (Faculty Mentor, Harvard’s Applied History Project; Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) reflects on lessons from the administrations of three US presidents at the heart of the war: Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, and John Kennedy. The first lesson, Logevall says, is that “the political utility of force is really quite narrow. Wars have to be won politically if they are to be won at all,” which he argues is relevant to more recent questions about US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. “Second, counter insurgence is at best an expensive time-consuming chancy proposition, especially for a foreign power, because it’s always hard for a local population to see an occupying force as its friend.” Noting the more than 3 million deaths from the Vietnam War, especially the fact that two-thirds were Vietnamese civilians, Logevall says that counterinsurgency “also involves, it seems to me, great violence,” not just “the notion of winning hearts and minds.” The third and final lesson is that “exaggerating the stakes in a given war can come back to bite you.” Leaders who “proclaimed time and again publicly” that, for example, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan were each “a vital interest,” then “find it impossible to back away—less for grand geopolitical reasons than for domestic partisan and careerist reasons.”

Radchenko Wins 2025 Lionel Gelber Prize for *To Run the World*

Presented at the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, this year’s Lionel Gelber Prize—given annually to the best non-fiction book on foreign affairs—was given to **Sergey Radchenko** (Professor, Johns Hopkins SAIS) for *To Run the World: The Kremlin’s Cold War Bid for Global Power*, which he presented to Harvard’s Applied History Working Group in March. Speaking during the award ceremony, Radchenko reflected that “more than anything in the book I look at the idea of greatness, what it meant to the Kremlin, why the Soviet leaders were so obsessed with it.” On the other hand, “the Soviet Union was certainly not the only country that historically has aspired to greatness, nor its leaders the only leaders in history driven by ambition. If anything, struggle for power and for recognition of one’s power by rivals as well as by clients has been a defining feature of international politics ever since recorded history.” What that means in terms of historical continuities, Radchenko concludes, is that “the Cold War falls squarely within the broader story that takes us back to Athens and Sparta or to China’s warring states period, and projects forward to yet uncertain future.” Radchenko was also featured on *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* podcast to discuss “What Can Soviet

Foreign Policy Teach Us About Russia Today?" and spoke on *The East Angle* podcast about why Trump seems to be drawing closer to Russia.

Leffler, Miles, Cohen and Others Weigh in on "Cold War 2.0? Power and Prudence: Lessons of the Cold War for the 21st Century" at Clements Center Conference

Hosted by the Clements Center for National Security, the University of Texas at Austin's History Department, and the America in the World Consortium, several members of the Applied History Network traveled to the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs to reflect on lessons from the Cold War for today's geopolitical challenges. In his introductory keynote, **Melvyn Leffler** (Emeritus Professor of American History, University of Virginia) argues that "we can learn a lot from the Cold War, even though we are not in a Cold War and should not want to be in one." Among the lessons: "competition however intense must not lead to hot war;" "liberal values matter;" and "soft power counts." These can, in turn, "illuminate how to construct a coherent definition of vital interests, how to conduct our diplomacy intelligently, and how to use the market and the state to nurture prosperity at home and abroad." In the first session on "Military Power: Lessons from the Cold War," moderated by **Eliot Cohen** (Professor Emeritus, Johns Hopkins SAIS), **Simon Miles** (Associate Professor, Duke Sanford School) highlights a lesson on ideology. Despite that "Today or during the Cold War, ideology is part of how these states define themselves," he asserts, "It would be a mistake, to me, to conflate rigid ideology—as, for example, the Soviet Union had—with an inability to adapt and innovate." Miles argues Ukrainian leaders ultimately made this mistake when they "failed to understand the extent to which the Russian military could actually innovate and adapt" in the current war.

Faust and Meacham Examine "Democracy Through the Lens of History"

In conversation with **Drew Gilpin Faust** (President Emerita and University Research Professor, Harvard University) at Harvard's Institute of Politics, **Jon Meacham** (Chair in American Presidency, Vanderbilt University) reflects on President Trump in his second term: "I thought he was a difference of degree but not kind. I thought that this

was as if Huey Long or Joe McCarthy or George Wallace had become president, and then came the 2020 election, the aftermath of that election—not just January 6 but also the calls to the Secretaries of State, the attempts to thwart what was a free and fair election—and that's a difference of kind." Speaking in the John F. Kennedy, Jr. Forum, Meacham observed, "We're in a school named for someone who won a very close election and yet Richard Nixon didn't send a mob to the Capitol, and there have been many, many closer elections a lot more controversially but what prevailed in those eras was that sense of covenant…. My central worry at the moment is that there's an autocratic trend in the country that will be deepened and accelerated." Faust responds, "And so, it's up to us and we're going to get what we deserve, in some sense? It's a little frightening—but true." To move beyond this, Meacham says, "We need to find a way to reward those who do things that are difficult." He concludes that "If history has any moral utility—and I think it does—I hope it is not to intimidate people with the grandeur and glory of someone's life, but to show that flawed and broken people can do great things."

Zoellick Shares How "History Offers Insights about Economics and Foreign Policy Today" at North Dakota State University

In an installment of the Menard Family Distinguished Speaker Series titled "America in the World: U.S. Diplomacy and Foreign Policy," **Robert Zoellick** (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; Former President, World Bank Group) reflects on a key advantage for the United States throughout its history—openness. "Any society makes mistakes, but open ones are forced to confront their mistakes, and they're forced to learn along the way," Zoellick argues. "I must have been to 150 different countries in these different jobs, so I've seen lots of different places, and America is an incredibly gifted country in terms of our resources, our technology, the spirit of innovation." Zoellick concludes with the lesson that, as Americans, "we shouldn't be fearful—we could reshape the 21st century just as we did the 20th—but, in my view, we won't do it by cutting ourselves off. America's strength is frankly representing something better around the world." Zoellick also moderated a session on "Economic Systems and Their Implications" at the Clements Center's "Cold War 2.0?" Conference, adding his own remarks to highlight the lasting value of William Seward's "notion of a North American Union based on free choice, not conquest or coercion" and, relatedly, the fact that "attractive power, which Seward is partly talking about, or Joe Nye's soft power, is a powerful asset beyond North America."

Zelikow Argues American Politics Must Adapt as the Country Reinvents Itself on *Clearer than Truth*

Speaking with **Nathan Kiker** and **George Bogden** (Hosts, Clearer than Truth), **Philip Zelikow** (Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) compares the rate of societal change and the political reaction to it today with the changes of the early 1900s. In the "First half of the 20th century, people thought the old America is broken and gone." Rural America, run by a spoils system, was being replaced with a new system that was urban, industrial, and "powered by scientific and engineering talent. And we needed to build a whole new thing called a public school system." The government reinvented itself to meet the challenges it faced. Today, "We are seeing the ascendance of a new technology engineering elite… a product of the digital revolution." This elite is "shocked and appalled" by government bureaucracy, and in extreme cases clashes with it. As the country reinvents itself yet again, Zelikow observes, both parties have to come up with what he terms a "competence agenda for how to renovate America," showing how government will change itself to more effectively provide for the country.

Ehrhardt Defends Resilience of Multilateralism in a Changing World

Speaking on a panel about "Peace and Security in a Turbulent World," **Andrew Ehrhardt** (Research Fellow, King's College London's Centre for Grand Strategy; Former Ernest May Fellow, Harvard's Applied History Project) analyzes whether today's international system is seeing a "crisis of multilateralism." He notes that "if you ascribe to this idea that international institutions were created then [in 1945] and they were unchanging all the way up until the present day and now they're being completely torn apart or restructured," then it may seem as though there is a crisis. But what this interpretation misses, according to Ehrhardt, is that "international institutions have always adapted, particularly to changes going on in the international system"—for example, the 1970s restructuring of Bretton Woods financial institutions. These multilateral organizations are ultimately "far more fluid than most people tend to recognize," and rather than regarding moments like this as a crisis, policymakers should see them as opportunities "for states large and small to affect the future shape of the international system."

Tooze Discusses "How U.S. Trade Policy With China Evolved" Through History on *Ones & Tooze*

On an episode of *Foreign Policy's* podcast, cohost **Cameron Abadi** (Deputy Editor, Foreign Policy) says that President Trump's "Liberation Day" tariffs got him "thinking about how one reads in history books about monarchs or political leaders determining specific military tactics on the battlefield." **Adam Tooze** (Professor of History, Columbia University) responds that "the analogy to a kind of early modern mode of governance is the appropriate one. It's haphazard. It's crazy. It's unlike any tariff policymaking that we've ever seen before." US tariff policymaking has never followed an objective formula—Tooze points, for example, to the late 19th- and early 20th-century attempt by American politics at "creating the so-called scientific tariff… which was a deliberate process of expert estimation" but was still "a mode of log-rolling." Nonetheless, he argues that today "we've lost any illusion that they're [the federal government] in control at this point." The consequence is that "If you start with tariffs framed the way the Trump administration has, there's no real way of reabsorbing it into a technocratic flow." Tooze concludes that in geopolitical terms, "the balance, if you like, of the historical direction of movement is not any longer toward a coherent American strategy of containment, but an AWOL, out-of-whack

America that basically leaves a vacuum into which China then muscles in this new stage of its economic development."

Kotkin Discusses Cold War II with Congressional Committee Members

Speaking in conversation with Representatives **John Moolenaar** (Chairman) and **Raja Krishnamoorthi** (Ranking Member) of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, **Stephen Kotkin** (Visiting Scholar, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) urges lawmakers to treat the present US–China confrontation as a second Cold War—and to see that as a strategic opportunity, not a calamity. Kotkin offers four historical templates for great power rivalry: hot war, appeasement, "Pygmalion" transformation, and cold war competition, arguing that only the last allows both sides to avoid catastrophe. And while a second Cold War may not sound appealing at face value, "The beauty of Cold War is that it's not hot war." "Winning," Kotkin says, means "investing in ourselves… if we understand what made us great, and if we get to a point where our friends and allies and those rebalanced relationships are good for the 21st century, nobody can beat us."

Kirby Provides Historical Perspective to US-China Trade Tensions on *India Today*

"Before the first World War, the European economy was extraordinarily integrated—Germany and France; France and Russia, considerably; certainly Germany and Britain, as great rivals as they were in matters military and matters naval, their economies were complimentary, one to another, to a significant degree—and that did not stop war from breaking out," argues **William C. Kirby** (Professor of China Studies and Professor of Business Administration, Harvard University). "The second World War, by contrast, is the best example we know of in which trading blocs actually seemed to accelerate the pace of conflict. The high American tariffs, the Smoot-Hawley tariffs of the early 1930s, have long been considered one of the causes of turning a real recession into the Great Depression," Kirby continues. "The fact that you would have currency blocs—a pound bloc, a yen bloc, a dollar bloc, limiting global trade to those areas—the trade disputes between the United States

and Japan are without question proximate causes of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941." For Applied Historians, Kirby highlights that "The one simple lesson of history, in the history of US-China relations, is that whenever these two countries have worked together, it has been very good for both countries. And whenever they have been at loggerheads, or at worst, at war, e.g. in Korea, it has been very bad for both countries," Kirby concludes. "Our interests are much more intertwined—economically, culturally, educationally—than ever they have been before."

Bromley and Freymann Discuss the History of Economic Warfare at Hoover Institution

Hugo Bromley (Center for Geopolitics Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Cambridge) and **Eyck Freymann** (Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) discuss "Economic Warfare and Crisis Contingency Planning: A Historical Perspective" in a session of the Hoover Institution's Economic Policy Working Group. Bromley argues that recent war games indicate "the United States lacks a contingency plan for the economic and financial impacts of conflict with the PRC, full stop." Freymann emphasizes that historically, successful economic statecraft by great powers requires careful management of relationships with neutral states. He recalls Britain's strategic handling of neutral states in World War I, for example, to show that "if there is one lesson from history… neutrals don't face binary choices in times of economic competition." In sum, Freymann says the goal of the conversation is "to put forward history as a potential bridge mode for bringing together conversations between national security policymakers and economists that haven't been happening."

Jobs and Opportunities

Call for Papers: The University of Texas at Austin Announces the 2025 "Bobby R. Inman Award" for Student Scholarship on Intelligence

The Clements-Strauss Intelligence Studies Project of The University of Texas at Austin announces the 10th annual competition recognizing outstanding student research and writing on topics related to intelligence and national security. The winner of the "Inman Award" will receive a cash prize of $5,000, with two semifinalists each receiving a cash prize of $2,500. This competition is open to unpublished work by undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in degree programs at accredited US higher education institutions during the 2024-25 academic year. The deadline for submitting papers is June 30, 2025. More information can be found here.

Project Updates

University of Georgia Launches Certificate in Applied History Program

In a partnership between its School of Public and International Affairs and Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, the University of Georgia will now offer students an opportunity to gain an Applied History Certificate in a program "designed to equip students with the skills to use historical analysis in policy making, politics, and international affairs." **Matthew Auer** (Dean, University of Georgia's School of Public and International Affairs) commented that "Understanding history isn't just about studying the past—it's about applying its lessons to today's most pressing challenges. This program will empower students to 'think in time' and bring historical insights into public service, policy analysis, and leadership roles." More information can be found here.

Applied History Articles of the Month

"The New Deal Is a Stinging Rebuke to Trump and Trumpism" – Jamelle Bouie, *The New York Times*, April 30, 2025.

Comparing Donald Trump's first 100 days in his second administration to that of Franklin Roosevelt, who "established the first 100 days as a yardstick for executive action," **Jamelle Bouie** (opinion columnist, *The New York Times*) argues that if "Roosevelt's legislative skill was a demonstration of his strength, then Trump's reliance on executive orders is a sign of his weakness." The lesson from President Trump's predecessor about federal government reform, Bouie finds, is that "Roosevelt could orchestrate the transformative program of his 100 days because he tied his plan to American government as it existed, even as he worked to remake it."

"How Trump Could Make 'Muscular Mediation' Work in Ukraine" – Alan J. Kuperman, *Wall Street Journal*, April 22, 2025.

"History shows it isn't easy" for a stronger power to force adversaries to compromise, but **Alan J. Kuperman's** (Associate Professor of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin's LBJ School) research attests that "muscular mediation" can work if certain challenges are overcome. To credibly threaten both sides, the "muscular mediator" must be perceived as able and willing to flip-flop in its role as an intervener. Kuperman highlights lessons from the 1995 Dayton peace deal, ahead of which the US nearly failed to effectively coerce Bosnia into a deal because it had already spent three years condemning Serb forces on the other side of the table. When the Bosnians began to set ambitious red lines in negotiations, it took "extraordinary efforts" to convince them that the US would cease its support if they didn't back down. Based on this precedent, Kuperman warns that "if Mr. Trump is unwilling to play hardball with Russia, he has no hope of forging an agreement."

"The 'Nixon shock' might help us make sense of the Trump one" – Huw van Steenis, *Financial Times*, April 13, 2025.

"What will the longer-term financial consequences of Trump's tariffs be?" **Huw Van Steenis** (partner and vice chair, Oliver Wyman) asks . "A look back at Richard Nixon's experience in 1971 could help." The "Nixon shock" included removing the dollar from the gold standard, a 10% import tariff, and wage and price controls, leading to "global economic instability and uncertainty." Van Steenis argues that "As with Trump's tariffs, Nixon's were introduced to cudgel countries into changing the terms of trade to help reduce the US trade deficit." The final result was that "the need to stabilise international relations with allies helped tip the balance away from the tariffs," a dynamic that may be repeated today.

"Globalization Is Collapsing. Brace Yourselves." – Tara Zahra, *New York Times*, April 5, 2025.

The world has seen one previous collapse of globalization in its history, and **Tara Zahra** (Professor of East European History, University of Chicago) hopes it will not take a third world war to teach us the same lesson again, a century later. Amidst a global economy shattered by WWI and the Great Depression, globalization's first "backlash propelled the rise of right-wing authoritarian and fascist movements that promised to reverse or seize control of the forces of globalism. It ended in a catastrophic world war." The lesson? Zahra argues that "we need to address one of the fundamental byproducts of globalization, which is inequality."

Applied History Quote of the Month

"Good historians and social scientists do their best to ask questions honestly, objectively bringing facts to bear on their topic. But they and their students should be aware that what is selected is by necessity only part of the story. Always ask what questions the writer was asking as well as whether he or she carefully and objectively ascertained the facts. Beware of biases. Choice is a very important part of history and of writing history. The cure to misunderstanding history is to read more, not less."

– Joseph S. Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History* (1993)

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