HARVARD Kennedy School BELFER CENTER | 50 YEARS OF RESEARCH, POLICY, AND LEADERSHIP

Applied History Project Newsletter

July 2025

The July 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.

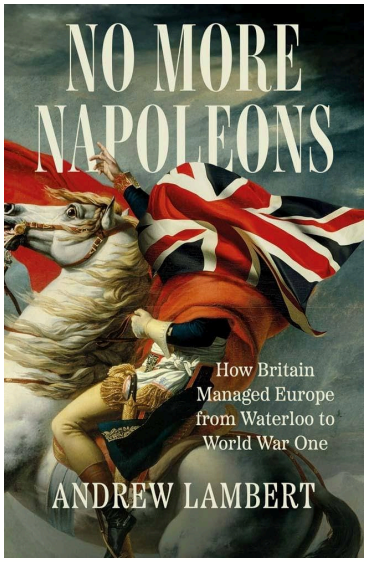
This newsletter is prepared by the Applied History Project at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center and edited by Jason Walter, Ivana Hoàng Giang, and Aristotle Vainikos.

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

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

Lambert Evaluates 19th Century Britain's Strategy for Peace and Security

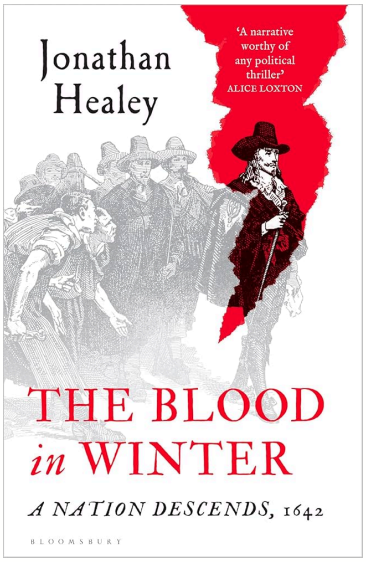
No More Napoleons: How Britain Managed Europe from Waterloo to World War One by **Andrew Lambert** (Professor of Naval History, King's College London) "is a salutary reminder that there is more than one way to achieve strategic effect." As **Brendan Simms** (Director and Strand Leader, University of Cambridge's Centre for Geopolitics) explains in *The Wall Street Journal* , at the end of the Napoleonic Wars,



Europe was finally at peace and the French Empire was no longer a threat to Britain's security. With an economy debt-ridden by two decades of war, "British strategists sought a less expensive and intrusive way to maintain their interests on the Continent." They achieved this "with a small army but a large navy and by knitting together a defensive system of forts and alliances designed to preserve the overall equilibrium… on which Britain's security depended." Essential to the strategy was denying France control of Antwerp "because it was from there that an invasion of the south coast of England could be mounted." The results were mixed. "For much of the period, the French were deterred without war, and British public support for the not-too-exorbitant costs was maintained…. But after 1900, Britain failed to deter Germany. It entered the war in 1914 in fulfillment of its pledge to Belgium after Belgium was traversed by German forces attacking France, by then Britain's ally." Simms states, "Mr. Lambert is well aware of his work's present-day implications for the U.S.," and he draws on the thinking of American strategists on the role of "'the offshore balancer' in the international system." In Lambert's words, "'There are new Napoleons in the system… and the threat they pose stretches from total war to the collapse of their regimes.'" Commenting on the U.S. as offshore balancer against Russia, Simms writes, "We are seeing the limits of offshore balancing as Russia digs in across Ukraine, and it remains unclear whether China's Xi Jinping will be deterred from attacking across the Taiwan Strait." He concludes, "The real lesson of Mr. Lambert's highly instructive book is how hegemons can lose the respect of adversaries over time…. The problem today is that we are not in 1815, but closer to 1913. The United States has yet to re-establish the sense of global awe that made post-1815 style offshore balancing possible."

Healey Delineates Erosion of Social and Political Cohesion Preceding Britain's Civil War

In his new book, *The Blood in Winter: A Nation Descends, 1642*, **Jonathan Healey** (Associate Professor in Social History, University of Oxford) examines the breakdown of what had been "a strong national taboo against lethal civil strife" following the Wars of the Roses and the suppression of the Tudor uprisings during the mid to late 15th century. In doing so, he raises an issue relevant to Applied History: "how, and why, societies may cross the threshold into mass violence."



Reviewing the book in the *Financial Times*, **Boyd Tonkin** (writer, journalist, literary critic) writes that Healey "fills in the fine detail of deepening divisions." Although "Everyone knew… that civil wars 'would make us a miserable people,'" and despite conciliatory moves from the summer of 1641 to summer 1642 to mediate the clashes between "an assertive parliament" and "a stubborn king" over "mutually disputed powers," in June 1642 "parliament presented Charles with the 'Nineteen Propositions' that would mean 'his almost complete annihilation as sovereign.'" Combining "galloping prose" with "a solid scholarly path," Healey "merges different currents in civil war history," ranging from high politics and royalists to preachers, pamphleteers, and radicals. He accepts the predominant interpretation that the king's "thwarted raid" on the House of Commons catalyzed the rebellion. Parliament had overextended its reach to church, ministers, and militia, denying the king access "'to his own arms and forts.'" The monarch turned to "'concession, disruption, and blunt confrontation.'" Trust was shattered. "Both camps had lost faith in their counterparts as partners for peace." For the general population, "'a choice was being thrust down people's throats.' Soon that choice would taste of blood."

**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.'"*

Applied History Article of the Month

"Balancing Act – How Allies Have Responded to Limited U.S. Retrenchment" – *RAND*, July 8, 2025

Predicting allies' reactions to Donald Trump's pressure for greater burden sharing.

Donald Trump's musings about withdrawing American troops from overseas have caused allied consternation around the world. He has wondered whether the U.S. "should be spending anything" on NATO, considered withdrawing thousands of troops from South Korea, and already ordered a drawdown of American forces in Syria. While Trump's unpredictability has left allies scrambling, a team of RAND researchers rightly points out that he is not the first U.S. president to talk about retrenchment, threaten to withdraw forces stationed in allied countries, or bring American troops home. In a recent article and report they analyze four such cases from the 1960s and 1970s—West Germany, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan—for lessons to predict how our international partners may react to similar drawdowns today. For each case they chart steps the ally took to limit American retrenchment and analyze whether it ultimately shifted its alignment away from the U.S., increased defense burden-sharing and ties with other partners, or adopted a less confrontational approach toward its rivals.

The authors' findings offer some hope for the Trump administration's ambitions. While West Germany did not increase defense spending after the U.S. withdrew troops, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan did. All four countries sought to decrease tensions with their rivals, but none shifted their geopolitical alignment away from the West. And while South Korea did start a nuclear weapons program in response to President Richard Nixon withdrawing 20,000 American soldiers from the peninsula, the U.S. was able to pressure the South Koreans into abandoning it. Drawing from this research, the authors offer lessons for policymakers today. These include: before proposing or implementing retrenchment initiatives, assess and address the views of the current government of the country and its opposition; recognize that limited retrenchment will not always improve burden-sharing; and weigh nonproliferation concerns against burden-sharing goals. By identifying relevant historical analogs, highlighting the key similarities and differences between them, and identifying lessons for policymakers, this research stands out as a valuable Applied Historical contribution to challenges Washington is actively debating today.

Authors: **Miranda Priebe** (Director, Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy, RAND), **Mina Pollmann** (Japan Research Fellow, Leiden Asia Center), **Naoko Aoki** (Political Scientist, RAND), **Alexandra T. Evans** (Associate Director, Strategy and Doctrine Program, RAND's Project AIR FORCE; former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center), et al.

Publications of Note

"Battle for the soul of Taiwan," by **Rana Mitter** (Chair and Professor of U.S.-Asia Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) in *The Observer*

Mitter commends the new book *Ghost Nation: The Story of Taiwan and Its Struggle for Survival* by **Chris Horton** (journalist) for clarifying the emergence and contemporary tensions of Taiwan's multiparty system. Mitter agrees with Horton that "there are indeed legislators, business people and civil society operatives… working illicitly or openly for Beijing's goals," but stresses that there are also "opposition supporters who are genuinely worried that a move toward independence might trigger a confrontation with the mighty authoritarian neighbour that can't be wished away." He concludes that "This complexity matters, because Taiwan's democratic politics is becoming increasingly polarised, and that spells danger for its civil society." In July, Mitter also offered keynote remarks at the Global Institute for Tomorrow's China in the World Series session titled, "One Belt One Road: What's Next in the New Multi-Polar World Order?"

"An Economic Agenda for the Class of 2028," by **Robert B. Zoellick** (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; former U.S. Trade Representative, Deputy Secretary of State, and President of the World Bank) in *The Wall Street Journal*

Citing "Alexander Hamilton's foresight and foundation" in establishing U.S. credit, which "enabled Thomas Jefferson to buy Louisiana, preserved the Union in the Civil

War, paid for victories in two World Wars and the Cold War, and countered financial crises and a pandemic," Zoellick asserts that in the wake of recent policies and rising debt, "America's next leader will have to restore the country's financial credit"—and that the American people "will be ready for a leader who solves problems, not sows division." Zoellick offers an idea last tried during the Obama administration: push Congress into an up-or-down vote on a compromise drafted by a bipartisan commission.

"Making America Alone Again," by **Margaret MacMillan (Emeritus Professor, Universities of Toronto and Oxford) in *Foreign Affairs***

Because trust between nations, like friendship between people, takes time to build, Trump's belligerence toward longstanding U.S. allies risks diminishing U.S. power for years to come, writes MacMillan. She highlights a fundamental clash between Trump's business-like view of international relations and the reality that "nations, like individuals, have long memories of past wrongs or defeats." MacMillan commends Henry Kissinger's groundbreaking rapport with Zhou Enlai as a model—or better yet Winston Churchill, who "worked on, as he put it, wooing Roosevelt like a suitor."

Lessons From the New Cold War: America Confronts the China Challenge, ed. by **Hal Brands (Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins SAIS) for *JHU Press***

In his introduction to a collection of essays that follows an April 2025 conference at Johns Hopkins, Brands stresses the decades-old origins of the raging rivalry between the U.S. and China: "One cold war might have ended, Deng Xiaoping remarked in 1989, but another had already begun." What distinguishes the new competition, Brands asserts, is the mindset shift required to once again view the world as split between economic, technological, and ideological blocs, after nearly forty years of globalization. "'One world' is no longer possible. Reconciling ourselves to 'two worlds' is the only way to win the New Cold War." The volume includes, among others, chapters about China's lessons from nuclear history, the chronology of U.S. debates about China and "pivots" to Asia, and the CCP's "intellectual antecedents" written by several members of the AH Network: **Frank Gavin**

(Distinguished Professor, Johns Hopkins SAIS), **Rana Mitter**, **William Inboden** (Executive Vice President and Provost, University of Texas, Austin), **Peter Feaver** (Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, Duke University), **Chris Miller** (Professor of International History, Tufts' Fletcher School), **Kori Schake** (Senior Fellow and Director, Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute), **Eyck Freymann** (Hoover Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution), and **Hugo Bromley** (Research Associate, University of Cambridge's Centre for Geopolitics). Brands also published a column in Bloomberg, reviewing the history of world orders to predict "Three Ways America's World Order Could Collapse."

"How the CIA Lost the War on Terror," by **John Bew** (Professor in History and Foreign Policy, King's College London) in *The Observer*

Reviewing *The Mission*—**Tim Weiner's** (reporter and author) new bookend to *Legacy of Ashes* , his 2007 indictment of the CIA's Cold War performance—Bew highlights examples like the Agency's loud warning about Russia's plans to invade Ukraine in 2022 (which even Zelensky and his government refused to believe) to clarify that, "In the history of the CIA, great human ingenuity and bravery sit alongside human error, groupthink and deep organizational flaws." While acknowledging evidence for Weiner's characterization of the CIA as "lost" between the Cold War and 9/11, Bew points out "stunning successes." Somebody—the CIA—"neutered" Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's atomic weapons program, and somebody—again, the CIA—located Osama bin Laden. Bew reminds readers that in trying to assess performance, "The road not taken is sometimes where the triumphs of intelligence lie."

"Where is Russia's Place in the World?" by **Stephen Kotkin** (Visiting Scholar, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

A sweeping analysis of Russian history—going back 1,500 years to the founding of its oldest city—underpins Kotkin's bold claim that "Russia is a Near Eastern-Middle Eastern country not only geographically," but also institutionally. Moscow has long operated on a form of patrimonial politics reminiscent of Russia's Middle Eastern

neighbors, Kotkin explains, with consequences for Russia's overspending on security and estrangement from the West. But Putin's pivot to the East is in Kotkin's view a mistake. He argues that "[Russia] has most prospered when closely tied to Europe…. The shared anti-Westernism that binds Russia to China, reinforced by the Putin-Xi bromance, is poison for Russia's future." Kotkin also spoke with Dan Wang in a Hoover History Lab Discussion about "How Historians Work."

"The End of Modernity," by **Christopher Clark** (Professor of History, University of Cambridge) in *Foreign Policy*

Arguing that "modernity is disintegrating before our eyes," Clark writes that the world is now "facing a choice between pluralistic, constitutional democracy and a range of authoritarian alternatives." Recalling, however, the "extraordinary" dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and emergence of a new German state—which "all… happened without a war"—Clark reminds us: "The era we are in now got off to a beautiful start, and we shouldn't forget that."

"Remaking the World Order Requires Thinking Outside the Box," by **Daniel J. Sargent** (Associate Professor of History and Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley) in *Internationale Politik Quarterly*

The term "international order" belies the "flux" and instability inherent in geopolitics, explains Sargent. The period since 1945 is no exception: decolonization's "'diffusion of power' remade an international order centered on the West into a more pluralistic and decentralized structure" by the 1970s. Today, a new world order must tackle old challenges (nuclear weapons) and new ones (climate change) alike, but Sargent suggests it should maintain the same normative north star as the postwar system—defending the dignity of the individual human.

"The State Department Overhaul Is Long Overdue," by **A. Wess Mitchell** (Fellow, Harvard's Applied History Project; Co-Founder

and Principal, The Marathon Initiative) in *Foreign Policy*

Mitchell urges the State Department to reskill its diplomats in negotiation and nurture regional expertise, recovering the lost lessons of 1,500 years of diplomatic history. “Diplomacy in its classic form,” he writes, “is the essential medium by which powerful states restrain one another, prevent war, and achieve lasting security. Those states that possess a high degree of competence in diplomacy’s core purposes—negotiation, local knowledge, and single-minded promotion of the national interest—will have a decisive advantage over those that don’t.”

“The Importance of Strategic Depth,” by **Nadia Schadlow** (Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

Noting recent developments in warfare such as Ukraine’s drone attack on Russian bombers, Schadlow revives the centuries-old idea of strategic depth to chart a way forward. “Today, strategic depth is about far more than land. It’s about flexibility: having additional options and time in an unpredictable geopolitical environment.” She recommends boosting resilience in the cyber and space domains, plus a “deterrence by distraction” playbook—preoccupying our adversaries with unilateral pressure and support to “frontline states” like Ukraine, Taiwan, and Israel.

“How Strategists Think About Keeping the Peace in the Taiwan Strait,” by **David Ignatius** (columnist) in *The Washington Post*

Ignatius writes from the 2025 Aspen Security Forum, where seasoned policy officials examined a “haunting comparison of current U.S.-China tension with the collision between Britain and Germany that resulted in World War I.” Then, as now, two Thucydidean rivals entered into unwieldy alliances; Germany adopted a “corrupt and fading” partner in Austria, not unlike China vis-à-vis Russia today. To avoid “all-out conflict,” the Aspen group concluded that the United States and its allies must take concerted steps to both reassure and deter China. Ignatius recommends that policymakers “focus planning to make war more costly and peace more essential.”

The Province of All Mankind: How Outer Space Became American Foreign Policy, by **Stephen Buono** (Former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center; Assistant Professor of Humanities, University of Florida) published by *Cornell University Press*

Buono's new book narrates the birth and development in international relations of the so-called "sanctuary" policy, which held that nations should preserve outer space as a special zone free from weapons, warfare, and political rivalry. The book traces the long arc of the sanctuary idea from the science-fiction boom of the late 19th century to its stunning political manifestations in the Age of Apollo. Buono argues that the diplomatic menu pursued by lawyers and political leaders during the Cold War may serve useful again as great power rivalry accelerates in space today. In July the University of Florida's Hamilton School of Classical and Civic Education announced that Buono would be joining its faculty. Other Applied History Network members who have joined the Hamilton School's faculty include: **Cole Bunzel**, **Barnaby Crowcroft** (Former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center), **Allen Guelzo**, **James Hankins**, and **Jason Kelly** (Former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center).

"If Trump Is Neither Hawk Nor Dove, What Is He?" by **Emma Ashford** (Senior Fellow, Stimson Center) in *Foreign Policy*

Contrary to arguments that the Trump administration's foreign policy is unusual or novel, Ashford finds precedent for actions like the U.S. strikes on Iran in America's history of punitive expeditions and "Jacksonian" interventionism. Based on the historical record, she offers the administration some advice: "Perhaps the worst problem with Jacksonian surgical strikes of this kind is that victory can breed overconfidence…. It can take a truly disciplined policymaker to resist the siren call of further intervention in such an atmosphere."

"The Nuclear Club Might Soon Double," by **Ross Andersen** (Staff Writer) in *The Atlantic*

Eighty years after the bombing of Hiroshima, Andersen considers whether South Korea and Japan are closer to acquiring nuclear weapons than at any point since 1945. He writes that maintaining a nuclear-free Seoul and Tokyo required constant U.S. engagement, exemplified by the tough-love negotiations led by Presidents Ford, Reagan, and H.W. Bush. If the U.S. continues to appear ambivalent today, Andersen warns, even the historical memory of Hiroshima may not be enough to keep East Asia out of a “proliferation cascade."

“Countdown to America’s 250th Birthday,” by **Paul Beston (Managing Editor, City Journal) in *The Wall Street Journal***

Despite the country’s political divisions, Beston reassures Americans that a celebratory, uplifting 250th anniversary is eminently possible on July 4, 2026. On the U.S. bicentennial of July 4, 1976, cities, states, and the federal government pulled off creative and unifying displays of patriotism—even as the country remained deeply divided over Vietnam, urban unrest, and an economic downturn. As in 1976, Beston anticipates “a semiquincentennial rally”: “If Americans are given to excess, we also thrive at self-correction,” he affirms.

“King of Kings—the 1979 revolution that changed Iran and the world,” review by **Charlie Gammell** (author, historian) in ***The Financial Times***

Gammell draws lessons for today from **Scott Anderson** ’s new history of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. If revolution is about “dislocation,” “frustrated expectations,” and a viable political challenger—the concoction that swept Pahlavi Iran’s “greedy elites” away in favor of the nationalist Ayatollah—Gammell predicts Iran is far from regime change today. Whereas spies and diplomats missed plentiful signals in the 1970s, Gammell writes, today’s analysts must value cultural literacy and admit dissenting voices to better forecast political change.

"Upton Sinclair Was 1934's Mamdani," by **Steven Hayward (Visiting Professor of Energy and Environmental Policy, Pepperdine University) in *The Wall Street Journal***

Hayward observes, "California has seen this movie before." In New York's mayoral election, business interests united to oppose Zohran Mamdani. They did the same to oppose Upton Sinclair in California's 1934 gubernatorial race. Hayward asks today's "divided" and "floundering" Democratic Party: "like the delicate calculations of FDR and national Democrats, will Sen. Chuck Schumer, Gov. Kathy Hochul and Barack Obama get behind Mr. Mamdani or work quietly to undermine him?"

"Opportunistic Aggression in the Past and Lessons for Today: The Korean War," by **Matthew R. Costlow (Senior Analyst) for the *National Institute for Public Policy***

"Although historical parallels are never perfect, U.S. leaders today also face the stark possibility of opportunistic aggression, or even coordinated aggression, under the nuclear shadow and thus will benefit from examining the hard-learned lessons of the past," Costlow writes. He cites General Matthew Ridgeway's perspective that "Victory in the Korean War might have been Pyrrhic if it led to Soviet aggression against a nascent NATO." The lesson for U.S. policymakers today? "Victory in a limited conflict may be ideal for deterring opportunistic or coordinated aggression, but the cost of victory may be deterrence failure in a second theater."

Interviews and Speeches

Ferguson Joins *Futurology* for a Discussion on "Cold War II"

How should we understand the new world order, amid Trump's retreat from internationalism and the rise of other powers? In response to host Nathan Gardel's question on the Berggruen Institute's *Futurology*, **Niall Ferguson** (Co-Chair,

Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) argues that a new cold war is unfolding: the U.S. and China are now, as the U.S. and USSR once were, fundamentally divided over ideology, technology leadership, and geopolitical influence. Ferguson concedes that technology does change the game. "If you ran an authoritarian or totalitarian regime, with AI, with a full system of social credit, with a total surveillance technology, you can be a far more successful totalitarian state than anything in the 20th century, including the Soviet Union." Ferguson is convinced that China's half-open half-closed system spells its long-term decline, but warns that as Europe discovered in 1939, even doomed autocracies can be dangerous. Deterring China remains an essential task, he contends.

Walt Talks American Power and Virtue of Restraint on *Hidden Forces*

Speaking on the *Hidden Forces* podcast, **Stephen Walt** (Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) warned about the consequences for the U.S. of neglecting alliances in favor of unilateralist foreign policy. During the Cold War, "the U.S. also treated the other members of [NATO] with a certain degree of respect even when it was much more powerful than they were," Walt recalls. "And therefore you didn't get the same level of resentment you would've gotten if the U.S. acted in a heavy-handed coercive way"—a contrast to the USSR's tense relations with its Warsaw Bloc satellites. Effective diplomats from Otto von Bismarck to George H.W. Bush during the Gulf War set goals and then, once achieved, exercised restraint to avoid overshooting them. Walt adds that the U.S. must become comfortable engaging with adversaries whom it historically would not have recognized. If we learn anything from the mistake of excluding Iran from the 1991 talks on Middle East peace, to which Tehran responded by arming proxies, it should be that powerful—if objectionable—states should have a seat at the table, concludes Walt.

Tooze Declares, "New Era, New Mood, New Challenges" on *Radio Davos*

Employing a foundational method from the Applied History toolbox that asks whether a given event is unprecedented, **Adam Tooze** (Professor of History, Columbia University) assesses that "We haven't ever seen anything like this before," referring

to the first five months of Trump's second term. "Graham Allison was saying we're like one-tenth through," Tooze recalls from the World Economic Forum's "summer Davos" in Tianjin. "This is a pace of news making, to put it at the most superficial level, of noise, if you like, in the political system, of rupture, disruption." For those "devoutly convinced in Washington that America has the stronger hand" in the trade war and the wider U.S.-China competition, Tooze warns that the U.S. was also "convinced that we'd won the Cold War. And then we're reminded, in rather abrupt terms, that in no single conflict in Asia did the Western side actually prevail, not in Korea, not in Vietnam, and clearly not with regard to China." In a *Financial Times* op-ed, Tooze also argues that "We used to know what the future of a globalised world looked like: cosmopolitan cities like New York, Paris, London, and Hong Kong," which had "national character but blended together people, ideas and money from all over the world." Instead, Chinese mega cities today break from expectations. Tooze observes Shanghai, Shenzhen, Beijing, and Chengdu "interacting intensively with the wider world but at arm's length," suggesting "we overestimated the force of globalisation in creating the characteristics of past global cities."

Ang Urges that China Needs "Directed Improvisation" Now More Than Ever in *SCMP*

China is embarking on a momentous economic transformation that requires new attitudes toward risk and control, **Yuen Yuen Ang** (Chair Professor of Political Economy, Johns Hopkins University) explains in an interview with the *South China Morning Post* . Unlike the last 40 years of "export-led mass industrialization," Ang says, "hi-tech, innovation-driven development" includes higher levels of intrinsic uncertainty. "The government cannot plan on creating DeepSeek, the AI start-up; it can only create an ecosystem that might give rise to DeepSeek." But other countries do not offer a cut-and-dried template, either. "Back in the 1980s and 1990s, [China] could imitate the late industrialization model in East Asia. Today… China itself has become a trailblazer, and other countries are seeing it as a role model." Fortunately for Beijing, Ang believes the toolbox of "directed improvisation"—centrally guided experimentation by regional governments—is as relevant as ever, though updating "key performance indicators" will be essential.

Ledford Takes Stock of Trump's "Nixonian" Pivot to Americas for UK Forum on a Multipolar World

In an interview with Durham University's UK Forum on a Multipolar World, **Joseph Ledford** (Hoover Fellow, Hoover History Lab Assistant Director, Stanford's Hoover Institution) classifies the Trump administration's interest in the Americas as historically typical. "The Monroe Doctrine seemed to be a subject of bipartisan consensus throughout U.S. history," he notes. Even George Shultz held that "'foreign policy begins in your own neighborhood'"—160 years after the Monroe Doctrine was born. Only since 9/11 has the Western hemisphere "taken a back seat" to the War on Terror and distant crises. Ledford explains that the pivot to the Americas corresponds with a deeper realignment in U.S. grand strategy: "I do think… the suggestion that the current regime is transitioning back to a more Nixonian realist position is true; if you look at interviews with Marco Rubio for example, there is a much greater emphasis on U.S. national interest than global issues." This does not imply abandoning leadership, Ledford caveats. But he concludes that the U.S. "is recalibrating its relationship with the world system."

Burns and Brinkley Speak on "The Age of Reagan" at Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute's Conference

Jennifer Burns (Professor of History, Stanford University) was awarded the 2025 Age of Reagan Conference Book Prize last month for *Milton Friedman: The Last Conservative* . Accepting the accolade at the Simi Valley conference, she remarked that nearly two years since its publication, "the opening months of the Trump administration—particularly the centrality of DOGE—convinced me that this strain" of "American conservatism that incorporates a libertarian free market anti-government strain" is "not dead." She adds: "it may have mutated, it may have combined with others, but it is still a very fundamental part of what makes American conservatism distinct, different, and—I would also argue—an ongoing powerful force." In a keynote conversation that kicked off the Age of Reagan Conference, **Douglas Brinkley** (Chair in Humanities and Professor of History, Rice University) says: "I've always felt that in the United States—even now—we're very much a celebrity culture," arguing that presidential biographies uniquely capture greater American public attention than other histories. "So, by nature, what president is 'in' at the moment is going to depend on the present time." That said, "legacies have to be managed for

presidents," Brinkley advises, providing an historians' insight into the lasting impact of the role: "you don't stop being the president when you leave the White House."

Project Updates

Clements Center Concludes 2025 Summer Seminar in History and Statecraft

From July 13 to 18, the Clements Center brought together 23 students from premier universities across the U.S. and abroad for its annual Summer Seminar in History and Statecraft in Beaver Creek, Colorado. Students participated in sessions on "The Nature of History," "The World Economy: China Chapter," and "History on the Battlefield," featuring distinguished policymakers and academics—including **Frank Gavin**, **Melvyn Leffler** (Emeritus Professor of History, University of Virginia), **Philip Zelikow** (Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution), **Robert B. Zoellick**, and **Charles Edel** (Senior Adviser and Australia Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies).

Applied History Quote of the Month

"The people are the ultimate guardians of their own liberty. History by apprising them of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of

the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views."

– Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia" (1785)

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