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Applied History Network Newsletter

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The February 2026 issue of the Applied History Network Newsletter spotlights member-contributed news items for more than 600 leaders in the Applied History movement across 70 institutions.

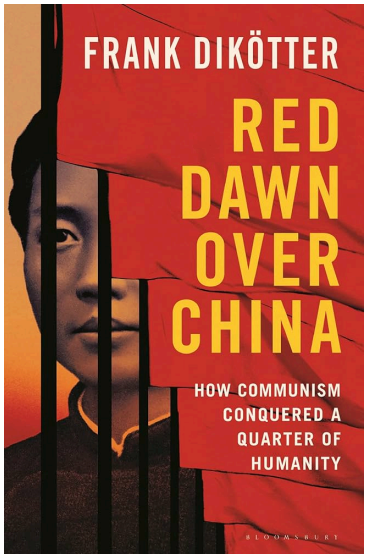
This newsletter is prepared by the Applied History Project at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center and edited by Ivana Hoàng Giang and Aristotle Vainikos.

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 "March Applied History Update" before April 3.

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

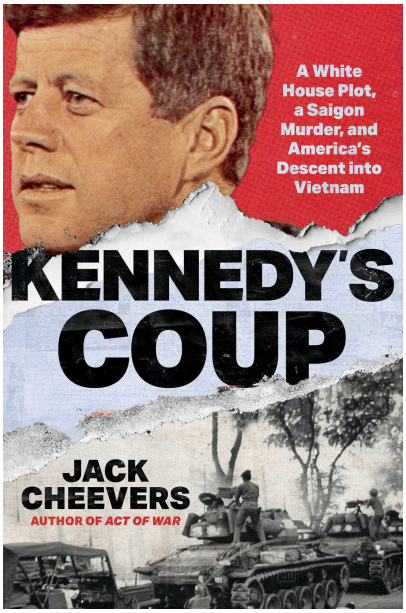
Dikötter Challenges the Historical "Myth" Surrounding the Ascent of Mao and the CCP

Red Dawn Over China: How Communism Conquered a Quarter of Humanity by **Frank Dikötter** (Professor and Chair of Humanities, University of Hong Kong; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) challenges the Chinese Communist Party historical narrative that Mao Zedong rose to power through the force of communist ideology and mass support of the peasants, arguing that a combination of violent subjugation of China's countryside and cities and Joseph Stalin's financial and



military support were the means of communist victory. **Tunku Varadarajan** (Fellow, American Enterprise Institute and New York University's Classical Liberal Institute) reviews the book in *The Wall Street Journal* and writes, "Mao after 1949 has been thoroughly reassessed by historians and is now regarded as a monster by most right-minded people; but views of early Mao—from 1921 until 1949—remain stubbornly rose-tinted." Through his study of "more than 300 volumes of original party documents dating from 1923 to 1949," which were published by China's Central Party Archives between 1981 and 1989 and have been little used by historians, Dikötter "finds evidence of 'how marginal the Communist Party was in the history of China' from its inception until the end of World War II." Across cities and provinces, party membership was fractional. "Before 1940, only one in 1,700 Chinese (itself likely a faked statistic) was a Communist, roughly equivalent to Communist membership in the US, 'a country not generally considered a leader in the world Communist movement.'" Stalin's money and men supplied the financial and military capacity for the CCP to take control of swaths of the country and critically, in 1945, the Soviet leader sent an army of 1 million into Japanese-occupied Manchuria, where they stayed for a year, "'locking out the central government of Chiang Kai-shek, quietly handing over the countryside to the Communists and helping Mao transform his guerilla fighters into a formidable fighting machine.'" Their methods were simple: "scorch the earth and conquer a cowering, starving population…It was a takeover by havoc and terror." Dikötter attributes much of the "myth" of Mao's success to Edgar Snow, who as a young reporter in 1936 spent several months at the temporary Communist capital in the northern province of Shaanxi, "'enthralled by the mythical version Mao offered of himself and his Party.'" A series of articles and a book, *Red Star Over China*, followed, becoming "'the basis for all subsequent accounts of the rise of the Communist Party, and by implication of the history of modern China.'" Dikötter's title, *Red Dawn Over China*, is a play on the title of Snow's book. In closing, Varadarajan notes that Dikötter uses a line from Sun Tzu as the book's epigraph: "'All warfare is deception'" and that fittingly, communist "methods were: 'feign, lie, deceive, retreat, hit, run, sabotage; view everything as a means to achieving the end.'" The book prompts Applied Historians to recall that the relationship between Russia and China is rooted in a long, entwined history with shifts in relative power, and that within China, the Party's early methods and objectives have endured.

Cheevers Brings New Details to the Kennedy Administration’s Role in the Pivotal Diệm Coup



Kennedy's Coup: A White House Plot, a Saigon Murder, and America's Descent into Vietnam, by **Jack Cheevers** (author; former reporter and editor, *Los Angeles Times*), is a "carefully researched and compellingly written" examination of the November 1963 coup in South Vietnam, "the event that arguably set the entire catastrophe in motion." So writes **Joe Zacks** (Managing Partner, Aardwolf Global Solutions; former Deputy Assistant Director for Counterterrorism, CIA) in *The Cipher Brief* . Previously unseen documents and cables, obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests, enabled Cheevers to reconstruct the policy dynamics of the US-South Vietnam relationship during the critical period between 1961 and 1963. In his account, "the Kennedy administration, through a combination of bureaucratic infighting, poor judgment, and a fateful cable sent while the president was on vacation, effectively green-lighted the South Vietnamese generals who overthrew and murdered" South Vietnamese President Ngô Đình Diệm. "That cable—drafted by State Department intelligence chief Roger Hilsman in August 1963 and approved by Kennedy with minimal deliberation—signaled to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge in Saigon that Washington would not oppose a change of government. It was, in the book's framing, the original sin that cascaded into nine years of costly and ultimately futile warfare." Cheevers draws vivid portraits of the episode's key players, among them: policy hawks and doves in conflict in the White House; Kennedy vacillating to a degree "that seemed almost paralytic"; a "patrician and ambitious" Lodge; in-country CIA operative Lucien Conein, reminiscent of a figure from "a le Carré novel"; the "authoritarian, isolated, and increasingly brutal" Diệm; and journalists reporting from Saigon, "extraordinarily passionate" and "increasingly bereft of objectivity." In his critique of the coup Cheevers does not excuse Diệm's repressive regime. However, "he makes a persuasive case that the generals who replaced him were worse, and that the instability unleashed by the coup pulled the United States toward deeper military involvement almost by gravitational force." For Applied Historians, the book invokes timely lessons of the unintended consequences of regime change and provides another example of "how a great power can blunder into catastrophe not through malice but through confusion, miscommunication, sizeable intelligence gaps and the bureaucratic tendency to avoid clear accountability."

**This section, currently written by Anne Karalekas, was inspired by Paul Kennedy and his wide experience in writing book reviews.*

Applied History Analyses of the Month

"Trump, the Midterms, and the Six-Year Itch" by Niall Ferguson (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) in *The Free Press*

Ferguson argues that the odds of victory in November's midterm elections are stacked against Republicans. His analysis of the midterm outcomes for seven two-term presidents since Truman shows that the president's party usually fares poorly—a regularity known as the "Six-Year Itch." Presidents become unpopular after six years for various reasons, including economic downturns, responses to natural disasters, and foreign policy mistakes. But even a strong economy doesn't guarantee success: in 1986, gas prices were down 33%, stocks were up 40%, and inflation fell below 2%, but Republicans lost five House seats and the Senate. The exception? Clinton in 1998. Ferguson argues that Democrats benefited from a strong economy *and* discontent with Republicans' attempted impeachment. But he says Trump will struggle to copy "Clinton's great escape" because Trump's party controls both chambers of Congress.

Ferguson's piece addresses an important question using historical analogies rather than fluctuating, narrow indicators such as polling. He casts a wide net for postwar cases of second-term midterms. By tracking the same key factors across cases, especially economic metrics, he isolates economic strength as a necessary but insufficient condition—contrary to some popular assumptions about the economy's decisive role in elections. Ferguson also analyzes the outlier case, drilling down on both its similarities and differences with today. For rigorously applying history to a big question, Ferguson's piece is an Analysis of the Month.

Ferguson also wrote Applied History pieces about Britain's chaotic politics and Trump's attack on Iran.

"Recovering the Lost Art of Diplomacy" by A. Wess Mitchell (Fellow, Harvard's Applied History Project; Principal and Co-Founder, The Marathon Initiative) in Hillsdale College's *Imprimis*

Providing insight for current US geopolitics, Mitchell turns to Emperor Theodosius II of Eastern Rome, which faced multiple threats from the Huns, Vandals, and Persians. In response, Theodosius acted on the "recognition that national resources… are precious and finite, and that the chief duty of leaders is to use them shrewdly" toward "attainable ends that matter most." In 442 AD he brokered a truce with the Huns and "used the time gained" to end an eastern war with Sassanid Persia and replenish western granaries threatened by Vandals before finally orienting Byzantine power to overcome the Huns. Mitchell argues the US should "recover the lost art of diplomacy," as Theodosius demonstrated, to either "avoid a war on multiple fronts potentially beyond our ability to win" or ensure "we are in a better position to wage it."

For identifying a cogent analogy and drawing concrete recommendations from the seemingly distant past—while also acknowledging that diplomacy does not always succeed (as in the case of Munich)—this piece is an Applied History Analysis of the Month. Mitchell's example of Theodosius II is one of ten from 1,500 years of history in his recent book, *Great Power Diplomacy*, which calls for the use of diplomacy as an enduring strategic tool. The Applied History Project was pleased to welcome Mitchell for a session of the Applied History Working Group to discuss his book with **Graham Allison** (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Professor of Government, Harvard Kennedy School).

Featured Commentary

Europe and Ukraine

"Why an Unjust Peace is Better Than More War in Ukraine" by **Graham Allison** in *Russia Matters*

Writing on the fourth anniversary of Russia's war in Ukraine, Allison puts the length of the war in historical context. It has now surpassed the US Civil War and lags WWI by only about 100 days. He argues for realistically reframing the objective of any peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia from achieving a "just peace" to "creating credible conditions for a sustainable period without hot war," since neither regaining the 20% of Ukraine that Russia controls nor forcing Putin to pay reparations is possible. Allison also gave an interview about US-China relations to *Caixin Global* and hosted Sir **Richard Moore** (former chief, MI6) for a discussion in Harvard's John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum.

David and Goliath: Commentaries on the Russo-Ukrainian War by **Serhii Plokhy** (Professor of Ukrainian History, Harvard University) published by Harvard University Press

In his new book, Plokhy presents a series of his essays, speeches, and articles that trace the recent history of Russia-Ukraine relations, culminating in Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. The book aims to illuminate the central puzzle of Ukraine's ongoing resistance: that Ukraine could "mount a successful defense against an enormously larger, more populous, and better-equipped enemy, even despite Russia's threats of nuclear apocalypse should Ukraine refuse to submit and the West interfere."

"*BBC Newscast* Sunday, February 1" with **John Bew** (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; Professor of History and Foreign Policy, King's College London)

Reflecting on the UK's foreign policy, Bew says, "We're in this great disruption in British history and finding a statecraft that adapts to that, I think, is the key." He argues, "it feels a bit like we're in that" post-WWII moment, which "was a hell of a time in Anglo-American relations" after the US ended nuclear sharing, cut off Lend-Lease, and undercut British policy in the Middle East. Despite a "succession of crises and a lot of tension," Bew argues, "We didn't mope around, saying it was the

end of XYZ order. We got on with doing things like NATO. We got on with our independent nuclear deterrent. And you know what came out at the end of it? An even stronger alliance, where you get on with things yourself." Bew concludes, "there are plenty of things we can do in this country to navigate this period of time."

"Munich and the Shadow of the Past" by **Brendan Simms (Director and Strand Leader, University of Cambridge's Centre for Geopolitics) in *Engelsberg Ideas***

Highlighting the many ways in which historical memory and reasoning from the past permeated speeches given at this year's Munich Security Conference, Simms attributes much of the recent tension in the transatlantic alliance to differing interpretations of the two sides' "shared past." Whereas Rubio's speech—"mainly a history lecture," Simms says—appealed to the West's historical ties, some European speakers argued that Europe "now defines itself in opposition to that past, with its world wars, Holocaust, and tradition of imperialism." Simms also wrote about the transatlantic alliance in *The Telegraph* and reviewed **Alexander Stubb's** (President, Finland) new book for *The Wall Street Journal*.

"Only An Army — And True Integration — Will Solve Europe's Defence Problem" by **Adam Tooze (Professor of History, Columbia University) in *The Financial Times***

"For Europe to work, there needs to be trust and co-operation and that requires balance," Tooze argues. "In the early 1990s, when German reunification upended the European status quo, Helmut Kohl had the wisdom to insist that a unified Germany be embedded in deeper European integration. That same logic applies today." Especially in the face of "America's exit from Europe," Tooze's view is that Europe "needs a European army… the solution preferred back in the early 1950s, when the project of a European Defence Community was launched at the same time as the Coal and Steel Community."

“The Price of Peace in Ukraine” by Peter Slezkine (Senior Fellow and Russia Program Director, Stimson Center) and Joshua Shifrinson (Associate Professor, University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy) in *Foreign Affairs*

Slezkine and Shifrinson challenge Ukraine and Western leaders’ “assumption that international order rests on a strong and consistently enforced norm against territorial conquest.” This claim, they argue, “does not withstand historical scrutiny. Borders have changed repeatedly since 1945.” They cite the seizures by Israel of the Golan Heights, North Vietnam of South Vietnam, and Indonesia of Timor Leste. Further, “de jure recognition may help curtail the likelihood of future conflict. Europe’s peaceful postwar order, for instance, began with a substantial redrawing of international borders following the violence of World War II. Post-Soviet Central Asia provides a more recent example.”

America's 250th

"America At 250: Classical Heritage, Western Civilization, The Future" with Stephen Kotkin (Visiting Scholar, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution), Jonathan Gienapp (Associate Professor of History and Law, Stanford University), Barry Strauss (Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution), Caroline Winterer (Professor of History and American Studies, Stanford University), Dan Edelstein (Professor of French, Stanford University), Anne Twitty (Associate Professor of History, Stanford University) at Hoover Institution

Introducing a conversation about the intellectual heritage of America's founding documents, Kotkin argues that "before you can decide whether to endorse or criticize a tradition, you need to know America's traditions well," including the influence of Western civilization and the Enlightenment on how we would answer the question: "What is freedom?" In her comments, Winterer re-emphasizes the significance of "the culture of classicism that the American founders were awash in," noting that "They grabbed energetically at examples from ancient Greece and Rome."

"How We Have Celebrated the Nation's Birthday During Turbulent Times" with William Hitchcock (Professor of History, University of Virginia) and Elizabeth Varon (Professor of History, University of Virginia) at the Georgia Historical Society

In reflecting on America's 250th birthday, Hitchcock and Varon argue that the US's previous major anniversaries featured just as much uncertainty and division as exists in American society today. In 1876, the US was suffering "profound economic depression," "class tension," "labor strife," "corruption scandals in the Grant administration," and the economic inequality of the Gilded Age, according to Varon. Hitchcock repeats President Ford's famous words, which encapsulated the emotion of the bicentennial: "'Our long national nightmare is over. [But] Our Constitution works. Our republic is a rule of laws and not of men.'"

"The State of the Union: Reflecting on 250 Years of the American Experiment" with Jill Lepore (Professor of Law and Professor of American History, Harvard University) at The John Adams Institute

"Very little that Donald Trump has done has a precedent in American history. All of it has preceded in the history of other countries," Lepore argues. "I say to journalists all the time, 'Talk to a historian of another country because our country hasn't done these things yet.' You could find a bit of this or a bit of that. 'Oh, this is like the Palmer Raids, and that's like the Alien and Sedition Act, and this looks like Japanese internment, and this looks like when FDR did 100 executive orders in 100 days.' But that just really distorts the extraordinary, extravagant lawlessness and ruthlessness of this administration."

"Dr. Douglas Brinkley on The Case for America" with Douglas Brinkley (Chair in Humanities and Professor of History, Rice University) on *The Bret Baier Podcast* on *Fox News*

"America has shown great resilience in our 250 years," host **Bret Baier** says, asking: "What lesson does that teach us for current times?" Brinkley argues the lesson lies in the Constitution's durability, which shows "that the United States was built to last." He adds that "the key thing is to always remember that our own times aren't uniquely perilous. It can feel like every day, this is the biggest crisis that ever hit, particularly in a rather new world of internet, social media, the tabloid headline can get hyped. But a lot of things are working well in the United States right now, and the ones that aren't, we got to fix."

World Order

"Geopolitics of the XX Century" with Fredrik Logevall (Faculty Mentor, Harvard's Applied History Project; Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School), Edward Luce (US

national editor and columnist, *The Financial Times*), et al. at Jaipur Literature Festival

If John F. Kennedy "were with us today," Logevall says, "what he would say the present administration does not understand is the limits of power, a sense of empathy, and the importance of alliances." In a UN address after the Bay of Pigs invasion but before the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy said, "'Let's remember we are but 6% of the world's population. We cannot dictate to the other 94% what should happen,'" adding "'that there cannot be an American solution to every world problem.'" Logevall concludes, "Those are profound words that more recent leaders need to understand." Drawing on his writings on India's first prime minister, Luce observes, "We are at a point where nonalignment and global systems of cooperation are needed more than ever, and Nehru was one of the most articulate people in modern history advancing those goals."

"The Future of World Order" by Francis J. Gavin (Distinguished Professor, Johns Hopkins SAIS) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

Despite "economic volatility and subpar performance, a weakened, distracted America less committed to its alliances, civil and interstate war, widespread domestic discontent and increased resource competition" in the 1970s, "the [world] order persisted, and indeed, even saw occasional reform and innovation." Back then, "Even deep ideological adversaries, the Soviet Union and the United States, were able to strengthen and stabilize the order" with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Helsinki Accords. Gavin concludes that "The next decade or so may witness something similar: begrudging acceptance of the current, limited, creaky order, with occasional efforts to address specific problems through new, ad hoc institutional arrangements, perhaps even efforts by the two superpowers, China and the United States, to work on shared problems… without resolving their underlying geopolitical disagreements."

"The Predatory Hegemon" by Stephen M. Walt (Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Affairs*

Walt argues that Trump's second-term foreign policy is best understood as "predatory hegemony"—a strategy in which a dominant power extracts asymmetric benefits from allies and adversaries alike in a purely zero-sum world. Examining this concept in light of the history of America's Cold War benevolence and post-Cold War carelessness, Walt applies the history of failed empires like Athens to warn that the approach carries the seeds of its own destruction: it drives partners to diversify away from US dependence, creates openings for China, and erodes the very networks of influence Washington is now trying to exploit.

"America's Grand Strategy in the Age of Polarity" with **Robert Blackwill** (Senior Fellow for US Foreign Policy, Council on Foreign Relations) at Institute for the Study of Diplomacy

Expanding on his recent report about US grand strategy and his proposal for a strategy of "resolute global leadership," Blackwill argues that "liberal internationalism isn't dead, despite what one heard at Davos and Munich. Nor are US alliances permanently fractured." In fact, US alliances "are stronger than many people believe," he says. "They've weathered hurricanes before with Charles de Gaulle kicking NATO out of Paris in [1966]…the Vietnam War, the Second Iraq War, and so forth." Further, Blackwill argues that analysts are making the mistake of underestimating the US: "The United States is not first among equals. It's first. It has the most compelling military power, largest economy, and greatest diplomatic reach." This month, Blackwill also spoke about US foreign policy with host **Chuck Todd**.

"The Globalist Delusion" by **Nadia Schadlow** (Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute) in *Foreign Affairs*

"More than 75 years since the post–World War II push toward global approaches," Schadlow argues, "The record of the past several decades should invite humility but not resignation." For example, "From Syria to Ukraine to Gaza, UN deadlock has neither deterred aggression nor protected U.S. allies, forcing Washington to rely on ad hoc coalitions and unilateral action." The lesson? Return to state-centered approaches, she argues. "Consider, for example, the fact that American assistance was vital in saving Ukraine from complete Russian conquest." Ultimately, "A state-

anchored approach recognizes that it is states, not global institutions, that are directly accountable to citizens."

"Russia's Arctic Game" by **Sergey Radchenko** (Distinguished Professor, Johns Hopkins SAIS) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

Radchenko argues that US threats to take Greenland supported Putin's longstanding view that big countries naturally desire and deserve influence in their neighborhoods. Putin's public comments since March 2025 approvingly note the "old and historical roots" of America's claim to the island, Radchenko shows. It is most dangerous when great powers disagree about the boundaries of their spheres of influence, Radchenko writes. "It is not too far-fetched to describe the Cold War as arising, in large part, from a clash between Soviet and US visions of their respective spheres of influence in Eastern Europe."

"Beyond the Cold War and Decolonization: Nigerian Foreign Policy, French Nuclear Tests, and the Politics of Independence in West Africa" by **Chloë Mayoux** (Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center) in the *Journal of Global History*

Mayoux aims to demonstrate "how international affairs uniquely crystallized interactions between domestic and regional politics in decolonizing states" and encourages perspectives "beyond the paradigms of the Cold War and decolonization when writing the Global South into world history." For example, "Reconstructing the fraught and forgotten beginnings of Franco-Nigerian relations shatters the myth of historical friendship promoted by their current leaders," Mayoux argues. "The article thus offers contextualization to longer patterns in the reconfiguration of Africa's international relations, moving beyond narratives of neo-colonialism and the new cold war."

US-China

"The Making of Xi Jinping's Worldview" by **Rana Mitter** (Chair in US-China Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) for *Engelsberg Ideas*

Mitter considers how Xi Jinping's "extraordinary" past has shaped the individual he is today, demonstrating that even the challenges faced by one particularly powerful man can offer illuminating insights into his worldview later in life. As Mitter argues, "Xi is very reserved and cautious, and I think that's because of the trauma faced in his teen days." Xi thus "always wants to be in control, and always be in control of himself," hence the perception of him as "very calm" and "very rational." Mitter also sees echoes of Xi's purges, like that of Vice-Chairman Zhang Youxia of the Central Military Commission, in the abrupt purges of 1960s China. Finally, according to Mitter, Xi might view Tiananmen as "an example of liberalism gone wrong: allowing too much leeway to interest groups can spiral into demonstrations and ultimately the potential destabilization of the party." Those historical lessons may have been on Xi's mind as he imposed the 2020 National Security Law in response to mass protests in Hong Kong, says Mitter.

"Is the Coming Storm Inevitable? Odd Arne Westad on Great Power Rivalry and Lessons from History" with **Odd Arne Westad** (Professor of History and Global Affairs, Yale University) and **Nicholas Burns** (former US Ambassador to China; Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) at Yale Center Beijing

Observing today "a set of rivalries and conflicts that could easily lead to…Great Power war," Westad describes his forthcoming *The Coming Storm: Power, Conflict, and Warnings from History* as "a book about what people can do and should do today to avoid that kind of scenario that we were looking at in the early part of the 20th century." In conversation with Westad, Burns remarked on the US-China relationship: "I don't think war is inevitable… with a lot of work and with connectedness between the two countries, we can avoid the worst." Additionally, **Jonathan Boff's** (Professor of Military History, University of Birmingham) review of

The Coming Storm in *The Spectator* concludes that " Learning From History Requires Sophistication And Skill."

"More on China's Biomedical Science From a Long-Time Expert" with **William Kirby** (Professor of China Studies and Business Administration, Harvard Business School) in *Science Forever* by **Holden Thorp** (Editor-in-Chief, *Science*)

Kirby warns that due to both long-term developments—the defunding of science at public universities—and short-term crises—Trump's reduction in funding for science—US universities face "a moment in which, as the Germans showed in the 1930s, it's possible to self-destruct." While around eight of the top ten universities in the world were German in the 1920s, it's "rare" for one to enter the top 50 today, Kirby says. Meanwhile, China's rise in the rankings and heavy funding for science mean that the US must "be realistic and accommodate." "We can't lead alone," Kirby argues. The interview followed another article by Thorp to which Kirby contributed.

"When the Chips Are Down" by **Julian Gewirtz** (former Senior Director for China and Taiwan Affairs, US National Security Council; Non-Resident Fellow, Belfer Center) in *The New York Review of Books*

To assess whether Trump's decision to permit sales of advanced semiconductors to China will shore-up US strength or backfire, Gewirtz turns to the contemporary history of China's relationship with its technology industry (as told by **Ya-Wen Lei** in *The Gilded Cage*) and of Nvidia's corporate strategy and style (per **Stephen Witt's** *The Thinking Machine* and **Tae Kim Norton's** *The Nvidia Way*). Gewirtz determines that China has displayed a formidable tolerance for short-term pain in order to achieve long-term self-reliance in science, while Nvidia has repeatedly proved heedless to the "societal implications" and "future risks" of its work. So, Gewirtz argues, China is unlikely to welcome Nvidia's all-hands effort to reenter its domestic chip market.

US Politics

"The New Global Tariffs Are Also Unlawful" by Philip Zelikow (Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) in *Freedom Frequency*

Following the Supreme Court's ruling that Trump's emergency-powers tariffs were unlawful, Zelikow argues that the replacement tariffs, claiming authority under the Trade Act of 1974, fare no better. That law addressed "balance of payments" crises under the Bretton Woods monetary system—a framework the US government formally declared obsolete in 1976. Because the statutory trigger has been inapplicable for fifty years, Zelikow concludes courts are unlikely to uphold the new tariffs, and points to better-established trade authorities as a more legally durable path forward.

"If Forced to Choose, Our Military Leaders Should Follow the Law Not the President—Like Ulysses S. Grant" by Kori Schake (Senior Fellow and Director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute) in *The UnPopulist*

Drawing on the constitutional crisis of 1866–1868, Schake examines how Ulysses S. Grant navigated an interbranch conflict in which both President Andrew Johnson and Congress claimed civilian authority over the military. Grant's imperfect but ultimately principled choices established a durable precedent: in peacetime, Congress holds a superior claim to military control, and legality is the officer's highest obligation. Applying the history of Grant's presidency, Schake warns that under the present administration, military leaders may again face this dilemma.

"Lessons From 1929" with Andrew Ross Sorkin (columnist and founder of DealBook, *The New York Times*), Gillian Tett (columnist and editorial board member, *The Financial Times*), Carmen M. Reinhart (Professor of the International Financial

System, Harvard Kennedy School), et al. for Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) America at 250 Series

In a discussion of Sorkin's recent book, *1929: Inside the Greatest Crash in Wall Street History*, Tett asks, "Are we about to see another version of the 1929 crash all over again?" given parallels to today's "sky high" stocks, tech "exuberance," and "the president yelling at the Fed telling them to cut rates." Sorkin's clue? "I think Ben Bernanke showed us the way. You know, he did his thesis on the Great Depression at Princeton and, ultimately, the lesson of all this—it's a very Keynesian lesson—is you need to throw money at the problem despite how politically unpopular that is to do." In the following plenary session, Reinhart adds that "from a historical standpoint, bubbles, equity bubbles, are very easy to pinpoint in the rearview mirror. In real time, getting the timing is elusive."

"Presidential Stories, the TRPL, and the Enduring Lessons of Theodore Roosevelt" with Doris Kearns Goodwin (Pulitzer Prize-winning author and presidential historian) on Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library's *Good Citizen* Podcast

Drawing parallels between the turn of the 20th century and today's world on issues of wealth inequality, immigration, and technological advancement, Kearns Goodwin recalls Roosevelt's "major worry at that time" that "people in different regions and classes were beginning to feel each other as the other rather than as common American citizens." To Kearns Goodwin, "That's what's missing mostly in our country I think today, is that inability to understand and feel what other people in different circumstances are feeling." She concludes with the reminder that Roosevelt determined that "for a democracy, fellow feeling is the most important quality."

"The Degraded State of the Union" by Eliot Cohen (Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Professor Emeritus, Johns Hopkins SAIS) in *The Atlantic*

Cohen calls for a return to "dignity" in American political discourse, beginning with the State of the Union address. He argues that, since at least Obama, the speeches are filled "with sucker punches thrown at the opposition party," a deviation from the

“balanced” and topical address that JFK gave in 1963, for example. The ultimate model, Cohen claims, remains Lincoln’s 1860 Cooper Union speech on slavery, which was “high-minded,” fair to his opponents’ claims, and convincingly argued with a careful analysis of the Founders’ views. This month, Cohen also wrote in The Atlantic about Secretary of State Rubio’s address at the Munich Security Conference and the high risks of Trump’s attack on Iran.

“A post-Trump restoration is still possible” by **Gideon Rachman** (chief foreign affairs commentator) in *Financial Times*

Rachman argues that the US could “return to the politics and policies of the pre-Trump era,” just as democracy was restored in Greece in 1975 after seven years of rule by a military junta, or as voters in India rejected the ruling party in 1977 after nearly two years of living in a state of emergency. Rachman highlights the “gathering backlash” against Trump, including popular dissatisfaction with his immigration policies and Republican pushback to his threats against Greenland.

“Trump’s Foreign Adventures Will Cost Taxpayers Billions” by **Weston Kosova** (senior executive editor for Washington, DC) in *Bloomberg*

Kosova contrasts what he sees as Trump’s silence about the costs of the “ever-multiplying foreign adventures” that he is authorizing with the concern that previous US presidents showed for finding “sensible and honest” ways (in Harry Truman’s terms) to fund war. Citing research by **Linda Bilmes** (Senior Lecturer in Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School), Kosova writes that presidents often raised taxes in wartime—thereby increasing their accountability to the public—rather than adding to the national debt, a practice that has become common since George W. Bush used it to finance the $4.5 trillion Iraq War (Bilmes’s conservative estimate).

Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control

"Arms Control Was Once Trump's Signature Issue" by **Emma Ashford** (Senior Fellow, Stimson Center) in *Foreign Policy*

Ashford retells the story of a younger Trump's declaration that "'Nothing matters as much to me now'" as nuclear arms control after the war scare that reverberated from the Pentagon's 1983 Able Archer exercise. "Reagan himself was chastened by this near-miss, contributing to his subsequent steps to seek de-escalation with the Soviet Union. Trump, then 38, was reflecting the zeitgeist of the time when he worried about the threat of nuclear war." Ashford concludes US interests should include pursuing "a world with more constraints on nuclear development… Trump understood that as a young man. He could do so again." Ashford also spoke on a University of Chicago Institute of Politics' panel on "New World Alliances."

"The House of Dynamite We Forgot: And What We Can Learn From Nuclear History" by **James Graham Wilson** (Supervisory Historian, US Department of State) in *Outrider*

Wilson recounts three false alarms of nuclear attack that occurred in the US within less than a year between November 1979 and June 1980. These incidents spurred action by the Pentagon and Congress to pursue technical solutions, especially installing upgraded computers during the 1980s, and to set up Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers that exchange notifications of false alarms with the Russians. Now that New START has expired, "the historical record of how nuclear superpowers successfully kept a House of Dynamite and averted the ultimate conflict" should inspire ideas for continuing to keep the peace, Wilson writes. This month, he wrote further about the end of New START for RealClear Defense and about the meeting between George H.W. Bush and Eduard Shevardnadze for the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy.

"Russo-American Arms Control at a Crossroads" with Matthew Bunn (Professor of Practice of Energy, National Security, and Foreign Policy, Harvard Kennedy School), Scott Sagan (Professor of Political Science, Stanford), Rita Guenther (Senior Program Officer, The National Academies), Feodor Voitolovsky (President and Director, Institute of World Economy and International Relations), Anton Khlopkov (Director, Center for Energy and Security Studies), and Dmitry Stefanovich (Research Fellow, Center for International Security, Institute of World Economy and International Relations) at the Stimson Center

In a wide-ranging conversation considering prospects for arms control and nuclear non-proliferation efforts following the expiration of the New START treaty between Russia and the US, nuclear experts from both countries argue that the history of arms control has relied upon not just diplomacy, but regular contact between experts and the tacit knowledge gained from decades of treaty negotiation and verification. Voitolovsky reminds listeners that there were periods in the bilateral relationship when "we didn't have any treaties, but what was positive even during very complicated periods like the beginning of war in Afghanistan in 1979… [is that] we used to have negotiations and dialogue between expert communities" to make progress on arms control. Looking to the history of arms control between the US and Russia, Bunn and the rest of the panel find reason to be optimistic the US and Russia can achieve "some level of restraint between the largest nuclear forces on the planet."

Applied History Methods

"In an Age of Superpowers, Geography Is Still Destiny" by Hal Brands (Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins SAIS) in *Bloomberg*

"Thinking geographically means seeing the strategic landscape in ways that unlock the long arc of history, that illuminate ingrained patterns of interaction, and that perhaps even reveal sources of advantage in struggles with deadly foes," Brands

argues. “The geographical mind knows the space for strategic choice, because it sees the tangible barriers that constrain and direct us. It seeks insight about a murky future by probing the recurring patterns of the past. For the US to prosper in this daunting era, it will need to make geography its ally.”

“Journalism and History When History is News” with **Martha Jones** (Professor of History, Johns Hopkins University), **Nicole Hemmer** (Associate Professor of History, Vanderbilt University), and **Laurent Dubois** (Professor in the History and Principles of Democracy, University of Virginia) at John Carter Brown Library

During a panel discussion about the relationship between history and journalism, Jones describes “profound commonality” between the two disciplines, which work “in service of the past, with a kind of fidelity to the record,” but also “in service to the present.” But unlike journalists, historians can elect to “enter or stay out of the fray” of politics and public opinion. Hemmer examines journalism’s coevolution with US democracy, arguing that “when you had a Cold War consensus in politics, you also had a Cold War consensus in journalism practice. In the 1970s, when that started to break apart, you can see journalism as the driver of those changes toward a more accountability-focused, ideologically-driven politics.”

“Special Issue: The Applied History of Strategic Communication” edited by **Carl Ritter** (Senior Research Fellow, Stockholm School of Economics’ Center for Statecraft and Strategic Communication) in the ***Journal of Applied History***

A special issue of the *Journal of Applied History* offers “examples of how the applied history of strategic communication can be approached methodologically and conceptually” in three articles: *Nuclear Testing, Media Wars, and Anticolonial Politics in Cold War Africa* by **Leyla Tiglay** (Postdoctoral Research Associate, Brown University Watson School; Former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard’s Belfer Center), *Lobbying on behalf of the Phoenix: Narcís Feliu de la Penya’s Vision for Catalonia in the 1680s* by **Barnabas Szabo** (Post-Doctoral Fellow, University of Cambridge’ Centre for Geopolitics), and *Finding Continuity in Climate Adaptation: History and Future in Strategic Narratives told by Water*

Management Communicators in the Netherlands by **Adriaan Duiveman** (Postdoc, Radboud Universiteit).

Jobs and Opportunities

Professor of Strategy at Air War College

The Air War College Department of Strategy invites applications for the Professor of Strategy position beginning summer 2026. AWC is a resident master's degree program for senior military/civilian leaders from the US and partner nations. The department receives excellent financial support for research, conference attendance, and professional development. Faculty in the Department of Strategy teach the Foundations of Strategy course (an examination of strategic concepts and historical case studies), the Contemporary Strategy course (studying modern cases), as well as electives and/or the Regional Security Studies course. Responsibilities coordinating educational wargaming will factor into the position duties. Faculty also engage in professional research and service. An MA and US citizenship are required and a PhD is desired. Starting salary is between $102,142-$130,219 annually. The initial appointment may be for 3 years, is renewable, and is tenure-track eligible. For further details on the position and application instructions, see the USAJOBs advertisement here.

Applied History Quote of the Month

> "'The value of history,' as the English philosopher R. J. Collingwood wrote, 'is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is.' For all that has

changed over the millennium and a half covered in this book, human nature assuredly has not. Studying the past gives us an extended opportunity to reflect upon certain ingredients that will be present as long as there are human beings. Only by escaping the myopia and hubris that afflict the human mind when it dwells in the present may we see, however dimly, the outlines of what lies ahead."

– A. Wess Mitchell, *Great Power Diplomacy: The Skill of Statecraft from Attila the Hun to Kissinger* (2025)

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