



The March 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 Hoang 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](mailto:aristotle_vainikos@hks.harvard.edu) with the subject "April Applied History Update" before May 5.

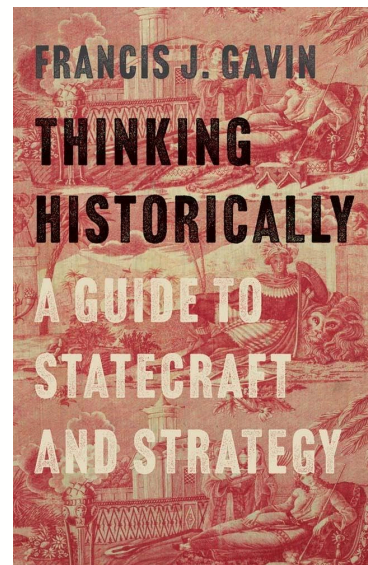
## Special Announcement

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### Gavin's *Thinking Historically* Wins 2026 Lionel Gelber Prize

In March, the Lionel Gelber Prize Board in partnership with the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy [awarded](#) its 2026 prize to **Francis J. Gavin** (Distinguished Professor and Inaugural Director, Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins SAIS) for his book *Thinking Historically: A Guide to Statecraft and Strategy*. "A literary award for the world's best non-fiction book in English on foreign affairs that seeks to deepen public debate on significant international issues," the Lionel Gelber Prize has been presented annually since its founding in 1989. "In one elegant chapter after another, Gavin walks the

reader through these complexities and leaves us less sure, more empathic, and wiser,” remarked the Gelber Prize Jury. “Thinking Historically is a more important book than E.H. Carr’s *Twenty Years Crisis* in helping us understand the crises of our times.”

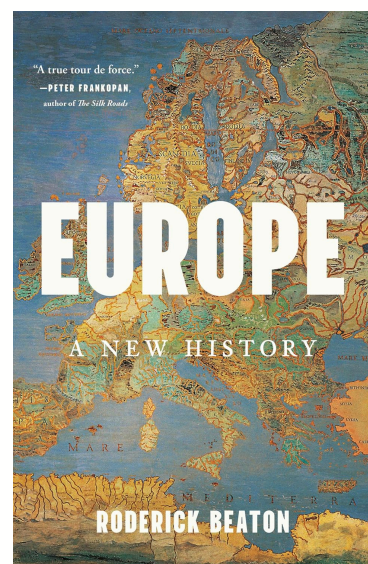


## Recent History Books Illuminating Today's Headline Challenges and Choices\*

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### Beaton Dates the Dilemma of European Integration to the Ancient Greek City-States

In *Europe: A New History*, **Roderick Beaton** (former Professor of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, King's College London) explores European identity and its inherent tensions over 2,500 years. Writing in *The Times*, **Oliver Moody** (Berlin correspondent, *The Times* and *Sunday Times*) [states](#) that although the subject has been “inked and reinked time and again in the blood of millions,” today it is “a matter of existential significance.” Beaton views the ancient Greek city-states as both the “wellspring of Europe” and the source of “two versions of the continent that has come back to haunt us in the 2020s.” One, “a world of perennially squabbling and warring pygmies” loosely bound together... but each “so ferociously attached to its own sovereignty and peculiarities that the fractious whole is ripe for the taking by foreign powers.” The other, a federation like the 3rd century BC second Achaean League, sharing a common government, military and legal system that spanned most of the



Peloponnese and almost half of the city-states and that influenced political theory in the Enlightenment and the constitutions of modern federal republics. In Beaton's account, across the millennia "Europe fell into the habit of defining itself against threats from the world outside" with Islamic incursions posing the most formidable challenges from the 8th century through the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. Another thread "is the gradual emergence of war-weariness as an engine for European integration," brought on by the Thirty Years' War, but still "wishful thinking" two centuries later when, after unifying Germany, Chancellor Count Otto von Bismarck pronounced "whoever speaks of Europe is wrong." Beaton sees little progress. Since the end of the Cold War conflict and the fall of the Berlin Wall, "the Europeans appear more lost and confused than ever, struggling to agree on a cogent response to the threats from both sides." He foresees only two possibilities: either a true European federation comes together, or like the ancient Greeks, the Europeans become "so obsessed with preserving their autonomy from each that they fall, one by one, into the grip of a more ruthless neighbour." For Applied Historians, although Beaton's conclusion is open to question, his consideration of the depth of the problem and his assessment of its significance are not.

## Vinen Portrays Churchill and de Gaulle as "Artists of History"

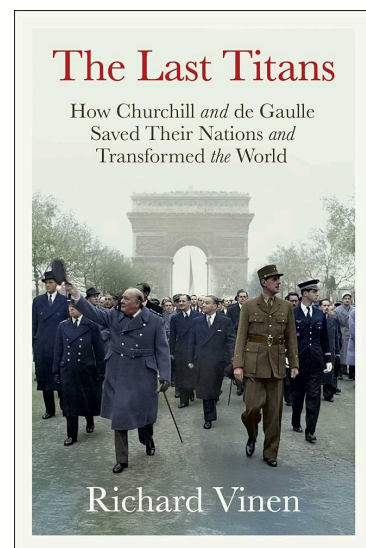
In his book, *The Last Titans: How Churchill and de Gaulle Saved their Nations and Transformed the World*,

**Richard Vinen** (Professor of History, King's College London) presents a thematic study of Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle "that doubles as a very British meditation on leadership, mythmaking, and managing national decline."

In *The Cipher Brief*, **Jean-Thomas Nicole** (Policy Advisor, Public Safety Canada) [writes](#)

that the book is "a lucid comparative portrait of two men who treated politics as an art and themselves as its principal exhibit." Both were "conscious shapers of national myth who understood that words could be deeds and that gestures could govern." Snapshots of

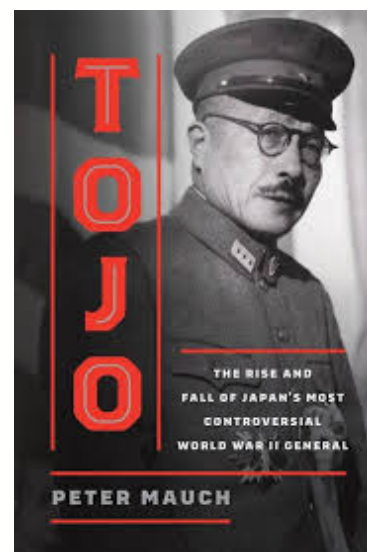
"Churchill dictating from the bath" and "de Gaulle's carapace of formality are not cabinet gossip but evidence for a deeper claim about style as statecraft, and about how each man manufactured legitimacy at moments when his country's fortunes were perilously low." Vinen selects decisive episodes during which the two men "staged politics as performance – shaping symbols, sentences, and statecraft to save Britain and France, and to recast their countries' places in a post-1945 world



order.” He sketches Churchill “as the consummate House of Commons animal – often inconsistent in doctrine, but unerring in his feel for the chamber, and, ultimately, for the microphone... De Gaulle, by contrast, made ambiguity a method: he spoke sparingly, let subordinates act on inferred wishes, and even disowned phrases later attached to his legend.” The Fall of France was the pivot point. For Churchill, “a military shock that vindicated his rhetoric of defiance; for de Gaulle, the shipwreck of a state that required a new act of founding, not merely a counter-attack.” In Vinen’s account, “the real test was not victory but the management of decline under a stronger ally.” Again, their differences emerge. “Churchill, the romantic, sometimes willed away awkward realities of British weakness; de Gaulle, more Bismarckian, grasped the American century early and plotted for French room to maneuver – small wonder that Kennan and Kissinger admired him.” Nicole observes, “These were not quirks of temperament; they were chosen as operating systems for authority.” He concludes with an assessment of the book: “Vinen writes with economy and sly humor, setting a scene, weighing a claim, and moving on with a don’s clarity and a reporter’s eye... It is a superb leadership study and a quietly subversive contribution to how we remember 20th century power, incarnated in its quintessential men of destiny and artists of history.” For Applied Historians, as Vinen suggests, the question remains today: “how to preserve agency inside an asymmetrical alliance without petulance or self-harm?”

## Mauch Delineates Tojo’s Central and Disastrous Role in Japan’s Foreign Policy

*Tojo: The Rise and Fall of Japan’s Most Controversial World War II General* by **Peter Mauch** (Asian History lecturer, Western Sydney University) is a portrait of General Hideki Tojo, who reshaped imperial Japan “through assassination, intimidation, and coups cloaked in patriotic duty,” leading the country into an expansionist and reckless foreign policy. **Jonathan W. Jordan** (historian, attorney, judge) [reviews](#) the book in *The Wall Street Journal*. Driven by fierce loyalty to the emperor, Tojo saw the Japanese Army “as an instrument of Japan’s divine destiny.” In the 1920s, “he joined with other young officers to break the army’s old-school power structure,” and as he rose through the ranks, “conspired with like-minded officers to push government ministers toward expansion into Manchuria and Mongolia.” The turning point in his career came when he took



command of Japan's Kwantung Army in Manchuria and defied orders from Tokyo, escalating the Sino-Japanese war during the 1930s and culminating "in all-out war with China in 1937." As minister of war and army chief of staff, "he honed the army into a fanatical fighting force" and exercised his influence in the emperor's court to persuade the imperial cabinet to align Japan more closely with Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. In October 1941, Emperor Hirohito named him prime minister. Simultaneously, he held the positions of army minister and home minister, giving him "extensive control over the government, the army and the state police." His fall was swift. US victories at Midway and Guadalcanal in 1942 and 1943 and the German defeat at Stalingrad, also in 1943, sapped his confidence in the inevitability of Japan's triumph, and drew his enemies together. By mid-1944, the loss of Japan's carrier fleet and the B-29 bombing campaign on the home islands forced him to resign. In Mauch's words, "The public held him responsible for having plunged Japan into the 'misery' of an unwinnable war." Later, he was sentenced to hanging and executed. Jordan praises the book as "a deeply researched and unsparing portrait of Japan's most infamous modern leader... Mr. Mauch shows how one man's discipline and ideological rigidity helped steer a nation into a war it was unprepared to fight." An enduring and always sobering lesson for Applied Historians.

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

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## **Applied History Analyses of the Month**

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**["What Drives Trump 2.0?"](#) by Brendan Simms (Director and Strand Leader, University of Cambridge's Centre for Geopolitics) in *Engelsberg Ideas***

"We have only ourselves to blame for ignoring polite American requests for greater burden sharing for so long, and – worse – for not listening to Donald Trump's warnings going back as far as the 1980s." For leaders trying to understand their American counterpart today, Simms demonstrates the importance of asking, "Who am I dealing with?" in Trump. "In October 1980, as US hostages languished in

Tehran, [Trump] opined that the situation was symptomatic of the global lack of 'respect' for the United States." Simms reminds those shocked by the US war against Iran that "In May 1988, Trump announced that 'I'd be harsh on Iran. They've been beating us psychologically, making us look a bunch of fools.' If they so much fired at US forces, Trump warned, he would 'do a number on Kharg Island.'"

How should other countries prepare for what comes next? Simms' clue comes from another scene in the biographical movie about Trump. In the wake of the Plaza Accord of 1985 "leading to a buying spree in the United States and elsewhere" by Japan, "Trump proposed, in effect, that this bonanza be top-sliced to reimburse the United States for defending Japan." So, Simms concludes, "what we are seeing is another attempt to establish a global Plaza Accord, a re-organised American 'Tributary System.'" If understanding Donald Trump is among the biggest challenges in the world today, then Simms' essay is essential Applied History analysis that demonstrates how looking at a leader's biography can help resolve key questions about their motivations and intentions.

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**[“Don't Let Britain Decline”](#) by John Bew (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; Professor of History and Foreign Policy, King's College London) in *The New Statesman***

Bew frames the “end of the current political order” as the latest of four great disruptions in modern British history, including the American Revolution, the period before World War I, and the Interwar years. What are the characteristics of each disruption? Self-reflection on the health of the British state and the renewal of strategic planning about Britain's role in the world. Highlighting in particular a 1931 planning document produced by a commission of eminent British scientists and historians, Bew argues: “The lesson from great upheavals in the past is that it required sustained political leadership... combined with the assembling and deployment of sources of national power by effective, technocratic means.”

Bew's piece successfully combines big-picture historical reasoning with policy-relevant insight. Bew makes sense of historical complexity by highlighting important shared features across different times, such as influential books that embodied each era's crisis of self-confidence (e.g., Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* in the 1770-80s, Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in 1939). As he notes in his introduction, “there should be no apology for the application of historical knowledge – even in an abridged form – to help us light the path.” Bew also draws actionable lessons for policy planning from

each historical case. For example, he drills down on the membership and structure of the Political and Economic Planning group behind the 1931 “National Plan for Britain.” For offering a helpful periodization of the relevant history of British “disruptions” and uncovering specific ideas and forgotten institutions, Bew’s piece is an Analysis of the Month.

Bew also [wrote](#) and [spoke](#) with Lord Verdirame about international law and British statecraft.

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## Featured Commentary

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### *Iran: Military*

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[“Everything After This Will Be Harder’: Gen. Stanley McChrystal on Iran”](#) with **Stanley McChrystal** (retired four-star US Army General; commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, 2009-2010) and moderated by **David French** (columnist) in *The New York Times*

While events between the 1979 Revolution and Iran’s support for terrorists during US operations in Iraq reinforced the view in America that Iran was “a recalcitrant enemy,” McChrystal points out that “for an Iranian, it really starts in 1953” with US covert action to overthrow Iran’s elected leader. “Whenever we think of what’s happening now: If we don’t understand that journey to this point, we don’t understand the attitudes that are going to drive decisions people make.” Further, McChrystal argues that Trump has fallen victim to the same “three great seductions” that have often tempted American leaders: that covert action, Special Operations raids, and air power alone can achieve grand political objectives for near-zero cost.

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[“Academics, Reagan, Cold War and Hot Conflicts”](#) with **William Inboden** (Executive Vice President and Provost, University of

## Texas at Austin) on *The Sherry Sylvester Show*

Inboden argues that, in the long view of hostility between the US and Iran, the current conflict is just the latest stage in a 47-year war since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Offering lessons from Reagan's worldview, which "fundamentally saw our national security threats as battles of ideas," Inboden analogizes the clash between the US and "militantly Islamic" Iran with the US's fight against Soviet atheism and communism. Inboden also describes the University of Texas' increasing efforts to give students "a real grounding in the principles and the great texts of western civilization and the American constitutional order" to equip them for citizenship.

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## [“What the Iraq Wars Tell Us About the Conflict in Iran”](#) by Lawrence Freedman (Emeritus Professor of War Studies, King's College London) in *Bloomberg*

Reviewing the history of Iraq's wars with Iran in 1980 and the US in both 1991 and 2003, Freedman argues that regimes are hard to topple, ensuring their replacement by a better alternative is even more challenging, and intervening without full commitment of ground forces "forfeits control over the outcome" entirely. Just as Saddam "portrayed survival as victory" in 1991, the survival of Iran's regime will make Trump's operation "look like a failure," Freedman warns. And, staffed by hardliners who maintain sufficient "firepower to control the streets" of Tehran, "the remaining elements of the Iranian regime will be hard to prise from power."

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## [“Overconfidence Is How Wars Are Lost – Lessons from Vietnam, Afghanistan and Ukraine for The War in Iran Were Ignored”](#) by Monica Toft (Professor of International Politics and Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, Tufts' Fletcher School) in *The Conversation*

Warning of the risks of overconfidence and miscalculation in entering conflicts, Toft warns that the current Iran war demonstrates the latest example of "the catastrophic gap between what leaders believe going in and what war actually delivers." Citing examples of the US in Vietnam and Afghanistan and Russia in Afghanistan and

Ukraine, Toft highlights cases where “a materially weaker defender can impose huge costs on a stronger attacker,” and concludes that to win, Iran “needs only to raise costs, exploit chokepoints and wait for a fracture among U.S. allies and domestic political opposition to force a fake U.S. declaration of victory or a genuine U.S. withdrawal.”

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**[“The Dangerous Rise of Decapitation Warfare”](#) by **David Ignatius** (columnist) in *The Washington Post***

Following the killing of Iran’s Ayatollah Khamenei, Ignatius challenges the view that Trump is unique in disregarding the decades-old US prohibition on assassination. Ignatius writes that Reagan targeted the headquarters of then-colonel Muammar Gaddafi in an airstrike on Libya in 1986 and George H.W. Bush attacked Saddam Hussein’s palace during the Gulf War. While assassination can disrupt command-and-control and create the possibility of favorable succession, Ignatius argues, it can turn the slain leader into a martyr and degrade intelligence collection by eliminating sources.

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**[“The United States Is Still Addicted to War”](#) by **Stephen M. Walt** (Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Policy***

Walt asks: “What’s going on here? Since 1992, a series of presidents representing both parties have run for office vowing to be peacemakers and to avoid their predecessors’ excesses and mistakes, yet once in office they cannot resist the urge to blow stuff up in faraway lands.” While the “hubristic mindset of the bipartisan foreign-policy ‘Blob’” may have been to blame before Trump, Walt enumerates other possible factors: “the long-term consolidation of executive power,” the practice of paying for wars with debt rather than taxes, an all-volunteer military force, a military industrial complex “portraying a world that is brimming with threats,” and the ease of using force in an era of cruise missiles, stealthy aircraft, precision-guided munitions, and drones.

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**[“Does the Iraq War Hold Lessons for Iran on Regime Change?”](#)  
with **Peter Mansoor** (Chair of Military History, The Ohio State University) on *NPR’s Morning Edition***

In an interview with NPR, Mansoor warns that the administration’s emphasis on combat operations, with no articulated plan for what follows regime collapse, echoes the Bush administration’s planning failures. Mansoor argues that the administration’s hubristic failure to plan out a long-term strategy in Iran “has echoes with the planning of the George W. Bush administration for the Iraq War.”

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**[“The Long, Sad History of U.S. Regime Change Promises”](#) by **Robert Satloff** (Executive Director, Washington Institute) in *The Washington Post***

Adding to the historical examples of regime change to which most Americans naturally turn—Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003—Satloff suggests that Trump’s encouragement for Iranians to overthrow the government may be more similar to FDR’s promise to help North Africans expel their Vichy rulers during WWII or George H.W. Bush’s call for Iraqis to “take matters into their own hands” in 1991. Both presidents opportunistically abandoned those maximalist entreaties, he writes. FDR “cut a Delcy Rodriguez-in-Venezuela-type deal” when a pliable leader of the existing regime appeared, and Bush chose to limit American involvement in the Gulf rather than reinforce Iraqi revolutionaries, whom Saddam defeated.

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***Iran: Economics***

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**[“Brace Yourselves. A Recession Is Coming.”](#) by **Niall Ferguson** (Co-Chair, Harvard’s Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford’s Hoover Institution) in *The Free Press***

In assessing the economic consequences of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway for oil and gas, Ferguson warns, “History shows shocks like this

rarely end without a recession.” In fact, “Energy shocks are part of the explanation for around half of American and British recessions—and that has been true for nearly 300 years, from 1721 all the way to 2008,” he writes. In particular, Ferguson argues that the 1973 oil embargo may offer the best analogy to today’s situation—and if it took Kissinger four months to negotiate a full conclusion to that embargo, we should be skeptical that returning to normalcy will happen much quicker today. This month, Ferguson also [wrote](#) about the parallels between the UK’s 1915 Gallipoli Campaign and the US attack on Iran.

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**[“The Iran War Doesn’t Have to Be a Rerun of ‘That ’70s Show’”](#) by **John H. Cochrane** (Senior Fellow, Stanford’s Hoover Institution) in *The Wall Street Journal***

Cochrane argues that the 1970s are not a good analogy for the economic consequences of the current war in Iran, given significant differences in the global oil market and reduced US dependence on foreign oil: “The U.S. imported a lot of oil in the 1970s. Now, on net, we export, thanks to fracking and the reversal of many energy restrictions... The U.S. uses a lot less oil to generate each dollar of income. We are more of a service economy and less an energy-dependent manufacturing economy. There are many more suppliers to the international market than in the 1970s.” As a result, Cochrane warns against government intervention in the market, such as the subsidies and price caps under consideration in both the US and Europe.

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**[“War with Iran Has Exposed American Fragility at Sea”](#) by **Rana Foroohar** (global business columnist and associate editor) in *The Financial Times***

Arguing that the war in Iran has exposed the US and the world’s lack of preparedness for geoeconomic disruptions, Foroohar says, “It’s amazing to me that we are not ready for this yet, given that we’ve been watching this movie for almost three decades.” She cites a recent [white paper](#) by **Mary Bridges** (Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard’s Belfer Center), who describes earlier key scenes from that movie. “History illustrates the risks of maritime dependence: when World War I began, less than a tenth of U.S. exports were shipped by U.S.- flagged

vessels,” Bridges finds. “As European powers reclaimed their commercial fleets for war, the cost of shipping grain from the United States to the United Kingdom increased tenfold.”

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**[“Economic Warfare w/ Aslı Bâli, Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, Nicholas Mulder”](#) with **Nicholas Mulder** (Assistant Professor of Modern European History, Cornell University) hosted by **Daniel Denvir** on *The Dig* Podcast**

“The analogy I’ve been resorting to is Suez in 1956,” Mulder says of the strategic dynamic unfolding in Iran. When Britain, France, and Israel conspired to take back the Suez Canal from Gamal Abdel Nasser, “there was a big regime change aura around it,” Mulder explains. “But it became very clear that despite the initial military success at the beginning, because the British and the French did actually seize a whole bunch of the canal zone, they weren’t able to translate it into major economic pressure.” Similar to today, “as the weeks went by, the economic pressure in fact became much stronger on the countries that had launched the attack.” A major difference, however, is that “there isn’t really yet that larger power that is able to bring that sort of pressure to bear,” as the US was able to do in ending the crisis in 1956.

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## ***Iran: Diplomacy***

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**[“Distinguished Speaker Series & China Connections: A Conversation with Nicholas Burns”](#) with **Nicholas Burns** (former US Ambassador to China; Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) for US-China Education Trust**

At US-Iran talks in Geneva just two days before the US and Israel launched attacks that started the war in Iran, “Foreign service officers [were] not present in any of those negotiations,” Burns observes: “Not just not in the pictures—not in the room.” Burns claims “that has never happened before in 102 years.” Emphasizing the

Applied Historians' tool of analyzing how different counterparts remember history differently, Burns argues: "It would have been good to have someone in the room last week... who understood the tortured history of our relationship with Iran going back to November 4, 1979, when Iranian students led by the government, inspired by the government, took 52 of our colleagues hostage for 444 days—and all the terrorism and all the pain and suffering since then."

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**[“Why Iran is Not Iraq”](#) by **John Jenkins** (Senior Fellow, Policy Exchange) in *The Spectator***

Comparing and contrasting the 2003 Iraq War and 2026 Iran War, Jenkins argues that the widely accepted lesson from Iraq—"the UK should steer well clear of any further involvement anywhere," especially the Middle East—does not apply in Iran today. For one, "it actually looks highly unlikely that on this occasion there will be any war on the ground," he writes. And Iran's domestic politics are different. The result of insufficiently interrogating the Iraq analogy? "The UK is going to be a mere passenger in whatever comes next. Blair wanted to avoid that. Starmer has plunged in headfirst."

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**[“Britain’s Leaders Have Forgotten the Art of Statecraft – Starmer’s Iran Debacle Proves It”](#) by **Charles Moore** (journalist; chairman, *The Spectator*) in *The Telegraph***

Moore draws lessons for Keir Starmer's approach to the war in Iran from Margaret Thatcher's analogous policy challenge exactly 40 years ago. While expressing her disagreement with Reagan's intent to bomb Libya in 1986, she ultimately agreed to support the US and allow aircraft to take off from British bases. Moore argues that by backing Britain's powerful ally, Thatcher gained some "right to influence further events," which Starmer—by rigidly opting for legal advice over "cunning" statecraft—has forfeited today.

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**[“Trump’s Iran Playbook Was Written in the 1980s”](#) by Alex Barker (world news editor) in *The Financial Times***

Barker makes the case that “Trump’s musings from the 1980s are a guide to his mindset for the Iran war today.” While exploring a bid for president, Trump publicly criticized what he saw as a cautious US response to Iran’s threats against shipping in the Persian Gulf. Today, Barker argues, Trump keeps “riffing off the same core argument: that if US power was being exploited, it should either be priced properly or used more decisively.” Trump’s personal past also gives clues about his negotiating style, Barker writes. “Trump’s instinct, then as now, is to distill a situation into a small number of negotiating moves — an incident, a deadline, a response — and assume the party willing to use the most power will prevail.”

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## ***China***

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**[“Postwar Choices—Embracing Global Engagement After 1945”](#) with Rana Mitter (Chair and Professor of US-Asia Relations, Harvard Kennedy School), Benn Steil (Senior Fellow and Director of International Economics, Council on Foreign Relations), and Jeremi Suri (Chair for Leadership in Global Affairs and Professor of Public Affairs and History, University of Texas at Austin) for the Hauser Symposium in CFR’s *America at 250* Series**

In a conversation on the evolution of the post-World War II world order, Mitter argues that “the way to understand China’s role at that time is as an anomaly, as a contradiction.” He explains: “In January 1946, China was simultaneously weaker and stronger than it had been at any time in its history for a hundred years,” because it “insisted on fighting back against Japan, became part of the allied nations after 1941, and ended up as one of the winning allies,” despite the war’s devastating costs. So, “China, under the nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek, was very insistent that not only would they think about China and Asia; they would think about the world.”

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**[“Trump, Xi, and the Specter of 1914”](#) by **Odd Arne Westad** (Professor of History and Global Affairs, Yale University) in *Foreign Affairs***

Westad highlights parallels between the US today and Britain at the turn of the 20th century in perceptions of relative decline and in domestic divisions. Similarly, Westad fears that “economic concerns in China, a bit like those in Germany prior to 1914,” could convince elites in China that the time to “rearrange its region to its advantage” is “now or never.” Looking ahead to the upcoming Trump-Xi summits, Westad warns that neither leader “seems to understand that temporary truces on trade and tariffs, or stated intentions on narcotics control, are not sufficient to turn U.S.-Chinese relations around.” Westad’s book *The Coming Storm* was [published](#) this month. His presentations at Harvard included a session with the Applied History Working Group.

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**[“A Blueprint for Chinese Global Leadership”](#) by **Adam Tooze** (Professor of History, Columbia University) in *The Financial Times***

How should China respond to the Iran war? “If China were to use the threat of export bans to bring either the US or Russia to the table, it would be a power move that defined a new era of global politics,” Tooze surmises, offering a historical analogy for comparison: “The Marshall Plan was a key moment in the escalation of the Cold War. The extension of the EU and NATO into Eastern Europe triggered resentment on the Russian side.” An analogous move by China “to assert hegemonic leadership will produce a reaction.” Tooze also [argued](#) that “Trump is testing the limits of America’s power” in a *CNBC* interview.

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**[“Did Biden Get China Right? Lessons Learned and What Comes Next”](#) with **Rush Doshi** (Senior Fellow for Asia Studies, Council on Foreign Relations), **Julian Gewirtz** (former Senior Director for China and Taiwan Affairs, US National Security Council; Non-Resident Fellow, Belfer Center), **Laura Rosenberger** (former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for China and Taiwan, US National Security Council), and moderated by **Christopher S. Chivvis** (Senior Fellow and Director of the**

## **American Statecraft Program) at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**

Three senior policymakers from the Biden administration reflect on the priorities and impact of Biden's strategy toward China. After Rosenberger lays out the strategy's key principles of "invest, align, compete," Doshi places the approach in historical perspective: "In prior administrations, it wasn't as competitive a relationship. In the Trump administration, diplomacy didn't play a central role in managing the competition... I think throughout history, when you look at successful statecraft, there often is an adept combination of deterrence on the one hand and diplomacy on the other." Gewirtz agrees that keeping diplomatic channels open was essential: "Countries around the world are looking at the US-China relationship, they are assessing how they see each of these two great powers, and that affects their willingness to partner with the United States."

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### **"Coercing Taiwan: China, Military Mobilization, and the Abuse of Sun Yat-sen's Historical Memory" by Giuseppe Paparella (Lecturer in East Asian Security, King's College London) in the *Journal of Applied History***

Paparella identifies a striking pattern across three episodes in 2021, 2022, and 2025: large-scale PLA military exercises around Taiwan coincided with CCP propaganda invoking Sun Yat-sen's legacy on national unification. He argues that Beijing deliberately pairs these costly military signals with manipulated historical messaging—exploiting a figure revered on both sides of the strait—to frame annexation as historically inevitable and peaceful surrender as preferable to resistance. The article offers Applied Historians a case study in how the distortion of historical memory can function as an instrument of coercion.

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### **Jimmy Carter and China: Multilateral Competition in the Global Cold War by Sheng Peng (Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center) published by Columbia University Press**

Peng “charts how both mainland China and Taiwan were integrated into global supply chains for defense and dual-use technologies during the 1970s and 1980s and the present-day consequences.” In a review of the book for *The Cipher Brief*, **Jean-Thomas Nicole** [remarks](#) that “The book’s lesson for our present is not coy. Export controls live and die by allied solidarity; sequencing matters when one pursues arms control with one hand and loosens the technological faucet with the other; and so called peripheral actors rarely behave as variables in someone else’s model for long.”

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**“[Electrostates vs. Petrostates](#)” by Nils Gilman (Senior Advisor, Berggruen Institute) in *Foreign Policy***

Today’s US-China competition “is an ecological cold war,” Gilman argues. “On one side, the Green Entente: China and an emerging electrostate bloc, which has bet its industrial future on solar panels, batteries, and the vast mineral supply chains that feed them. On the other, the Axis of Petrostates: the United States under Trump, Russia, and the Gulf monarchies, which have staked their power and fiscal survival on prolonging the fossil fuel era and weaponizing energy abundance against those who would end it.” Gilman asserts that “As during the Cold War, the winner in the struggle may well be determined not as much by the actions of the superpowers themselves as by the choices of the nations caught between them: what [Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney] called, with characteristic understatement, the middle powers.”

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***America’s 250th***

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**“[America at 250 and Beyond: Union and Disunion](#)” with Pete Buttigieg (former US Secretary of Transportation), Drew Gilpin Faust (President Emerita, Harvard University), Eddie Glaude (Distinguished University Professor, Princeton University), and moderated by Jill Lepore (Professor of American History and Professor of Law, Harvard University) for Harvard Institute of Politics**

In the first of a series of discussions on America's 250th birthday moderated by Lepore, Glaude argues that the US has historically been divided during national celebrations, from the early days of Jim Crow in 1876 to the Klan in 1926 to rioting over desegregation in 1976. Faust acknowledges that the "struggle for union" in America has never been easy: "If you think about the constitutional convention, they had to duke it out to get the Constitution." But Lepore argues that learning from the past should make us proactive: "If we think about the 1850s or the 1960s and think about the scale of political violence that was a catalyst for change... Is it necessary to go through the throes of that violence for change to happen?"

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**["Handed Down Through the Ages,"](#) with **Allen Guelzo** (Professor of Humanities, University of Florida's Hamilton School) hosted by **Jonah Goldberg** on *The Remnant***

Guelzo presents the second part of his book *The Golden Thread*, coauthored with **James Hankins** (Visiting Professor, University of Florida's Hamilton School), which examines how, "especially since the Enlightenment, serious questioning of this thing called the Western tradition has taken place to the point where it has now become an issue discussed on platforms of state and diplomacy." Guelzo contrasts the principles of the Western tradition with the belief "that power is the chief motivating force in all human interactions." On its 250th anniversary, Guelzo notes that the American Revolution, fought for values embraced by the Western tradition, "continues to have its impact, continues to set its example." Guelzo also [discussed](#) the worldwide impact of the American Revolution at the Levy Forum for Open Discourse.

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## ***US Foreign Policy and World Order***

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**["US Foreign Policy Under Trump 2.0: Is This a Rupture or Just a Transition"](#) with **Robert Zoellick** (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; former US Trade Representative, Deputy Secretary of State, and President of the World Bank), **Lora Anne Viola** (Director of**

**the John F. Kennedy Institute and Professor of North American Foreign Policy, Freie Universität Berlin), and moderated by Anthony Teasdale (Executive Director) for The Europaem**

Describing the grand strategy of the second Trump administration, Zoellick notes important parallels to Theodore Roosevelt's approach to global affairs: securing hegemony in the Western Hemisphere and a balance of power in Europe and Asia; serving as a mediator of global conflicts; and projecting power through the Navy (and, today, the Air Force). Viola sees Trump 2.0 as the latest expression of a 25-year phenomenon. "US foreign policy since the early 2000s, let's say 2003, has been wrestling implicitly and explicitly with the US's relative decline as a hegemonic power. I see Trump as part of this trend."

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**[“Adelphi Book Launch: Contending with American Exceptionalism by Dr Kori Schake”](#) with **Francis J. Gavin, Kori Schake** (Senior Fellow and Director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute), and chaired by **Paul Fraioli** (Senior Fellow, IISS-Americas) for the International Institute for Strategic Studies**

“What is unique about the international order that the United States and its friends created out of the ashes of World War II is that it's the first time a dominant rule-giving and enforcing power voluntarily limited its own freedom of action... That feels, to me, like one of the fundamentals of American exceptionalism,” Schake argues. Schake “does really, really well,” Gavin argues, “to ask the counterfactual. Put another country in the place of the United States in this position of international leadership and ask yourself, would the outcomes be the same?” Gavin adds: “If the Soviet Union has the economy of the United States in 1950, if China eventually comes to dominate the international system, it's not that far-fetched to imagine a completely different international order and different reactions from other states.” Fraioli also [published](#) a *Global Politics and Strategy* journal article arguing the AI “revolution now unfolding looks to be as significant as the Second Industrial Revolution, or more so.”

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**[“What’s Behind Trump’s New World Disorder?”](#) by **Daniel Immerwahr** (Professor of History, Northwestern University) in *The New Yorker***

Immerwahr traces the 70-year history of American involvement with Iran—from the 1953 CIA-backed coup that overthrew Mosaddegh to Obama’s nuclear diplomacy—to explain why past presidents held back where Trump has not. His thesis: American hegemony, for all its destructiveness, imposed constraints on the use of force. The concern for legitimacy, alliance management, and long-term order that shaped US grand strategy since 1945 acted as a brake on belligerence. Trump, indifferent to all three, has not pursued a leaner imperialism—he has replaced imperialism’s discipline with “hit-and-run belligerence” lacking strategic horizon. Immerwahr was also [featured](#) on *NPR’s Morning Edition* for an interview on Trump’s “new world order.”

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**[“Three Scenarios for a Post-Trump World,”](#) by **Hal Brands** (Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins’ SAIS) in *Foreign Policy***

Brands speculates on the future of the world order, positing three possible scenarios: two worlds reminiscent of the Cold War, a new age of empires, or a self-help anarchic world. While each of these scenarios seems like it poses an unprecedented challenge to global stability, Brands reminds readers that “Our belief that relative stability is the norm and rampant brutality the exception is the intellectual residue left by generations of benign U.S. hegemony.” Looking ahead, Brands offers a sober assessment, “The end of British hegemony in the early 1900s didn’t promptly usher in a new world. It unleashed decades of chaos.” He concludes that whichever scenario comes to fruition, we must recognize that “The old order is dying: Eulogizing a globally minded, liberal international order won’t bring it back.” Brands also [wrote](#) about the emerging prevalence of chokeholds in geopolitics in *Bloomberg*.

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**[“The Limits of Global Governance”](#) by **Nadia Schadlow** (Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute) in *Engelsberg Ideas***

“The military strikes against Iran by America and Israel illustrate a stark strategic truth: the post-Cold War globalist model is no longer the operating system guiding US policy,” Schadlow argues. She acknowledges the skepticism of those still holding onto multilateralism: “After nationalism fueled devastating 20th-century conflicts, leaders sought to constrain state power through integration. Yet the cracks in today’s global order – well noted at the Munich Security Conference – suggest an opportunity to reconsider how cooperation can produce results.” Schadlow’s recommended solution does not abandon multilateral institutions: “A state-anchored framework offers a path to renewing the transatlantic partnership by grounding cooperation in national capacity, democratic accountability, and practical action.”

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**[“America Has Become a Dangerous Nation”](#) by **Carlos Lozada** (opinion columnist) in *The New York Times***

“What we once called Pax Americana,” Lozada argues, “is gone, and irretrievably so.” Revisiting *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* by **Paul Kennedy** (Professor of History, Yale University), Lozada observes that “This is a historical aberration: a superpower that freely abdicates its leadership role.” Yet, “An American president who both boasts that his military assault on Iran can go on ‘forever’ and tells his nation’s children to settle for ‘two dolls instead of 30 dolls’ is exemplifying Kennedy’s argument. ‘Uneven rates of economic growth would, sooner or later, lead to shifts in the world’s political and military balances,’ Kennedy wrote. Put simply, superpowers don’t last on the cheap.”

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**[“Europe in a Time of War”](#) with **Anne Applebaum** (Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and journalist) and moderated by **Serhii Plokhii** (Professor of Ukrainian History, Harvard University) for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, and the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard**

Applebaum reflects on whether the world order is experiencing a “rupture,” “paradigm shift,” “transition,” or something else. She argues: “I’ve come to think that one of the best ways to describe where we are is actually a word that comes from a

literary history written by **Steven Greenblatt** [Professor of the Humanities, Harvard University]. And the expression is “the swerve.” Just as during the Renaissance Northern Europeans rediscovered ancient texts and their “thinking suddenly changed... we now have a cohort of people in Washington, in European capitals, elsewhere who have rediscovered ideas from the 1920s and 30s. They’ve brought them back.” Though, “that doesn't mean that things will now unfold the way they did in between 1933 and 1939,” she cautions.

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**[“Chaos Unleashed: The Second Trump Administration and the Future of the Liberal International Order”](#)** edited by **Richard H. Immerman** (Executive Director, Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations), **Jack L. Snyder** (Professor of International Relations, Columbia University), and **Diane N. Labrosse** (Executive and Managing Editor, H-Diplo) for The Jervis Forum Policy Series at H-Diplo

The Jervis Forum is launching its third essay series about Donald Trump’s impact on the global order. It follows H-Diplo’s first two installments on the same theme: “America and the World” in 2017 and “The Trump Experiment Revisited” in 2021, both of which were then published by Columbia University Press. This year, the H-Diplo editors aim to help contextualize and make sense of US foreign policy and international politics under Trump’s second term by drawing on historical analysis and political science. Snyder [explains](#) in the first essay of this series: “we seek to understand the sources and pattern of Trump’s foreign policy, its relation to American domestic politics, the response of international actors to these developments, and how this requires students of international relations to think differently about the global political system.”

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## ***US Politics***

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**[“Free Speech, Media and the Democratic Idea”](#)** with **Ken Burns** (Emmy-award winning filmmaker) and moderated by **Nancy Gibbs**

## **(Director, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy) for Harvard Institute of Politics**

Speaking about his *PBS* series “The American Revolution” during an appearance in the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum at Harvard, Burns argued that levels of division in the Revolutionary era were greater than those we are experiencing today. “It’s so Chicken Little — the sky is falling, it’s all over, we’ve never been more divided,” Burns said of contemporary commentary. “Yes, we have. We were way more divided during the Revolution.” He claims one key difference between 1776 and 2026 is the lack of decorum in political discourse. “We’ve always been divided, we’ve always been at each other’s throats. But the uncivilness of this is so profoundly disappointing.”

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### **[“Americans Should Stop Using the Term Christian Nationalism”](#) by **Heath W. Carter** (Associate Professor of American Christianity, Princeton Theological Seminary) in *The Atlantic***

At a time when Christianity’s influence on politics is viewed with skepticism by many progressives, Carter argues, Democrats can learn from the history of religion’s role in advancing US social policy and civil rights, as conveyed by **Matthew Avery Sutton’s** (Affiliate Faculty in American Studies and Culture, Washington State University) new book *Chosen Land: How Christianity Made America and Americans Remade Christianity*. From New Deal labor legislation to Martin Luther King Jr.’s activism, Christian values have motivated political reform supported by progressives. Instead of using the label “Christian nationalist as a term of political combat,” Carter concludes, progressives should get comfortable making their own appeals to Christian values in contrast to those professed by “MAGA-aligned Christianity.”

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## ***Global Politics***

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**[Saving Apartheid: White Internationalism at the End of the Cold War](#) by **Augusta Dell’Omo** (Senior Fellow, Southern Methodist University’s Center for Presidential History; former Ernest May**

## **Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center) published by Columbia University Press**

Offering a “prehistory of the present,” Dell’Omo maps an international coalition of far-right activist organizations that sought to preserve racial hierarchy in South Africa and beyond. She argues that this movement’s “successes and failures shaped the anti-statist trajectory of white supremacist organizing in the 1990s and beyond, planting the seeds for a global resurgence of the far right” that built upon the “enduring links” that had formed between conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic.

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### ***Applied History Methods***

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**[“A Martial Approach to Applied History: How the U.S. Military Turns History into Judgment”](#) by **Patrick Holland** (National Security Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School) for the Belfer Center**

Drawing on his military experience, Holland argues that “thinking historically,” as described in **Francis J. Gavin’s** recent book, has parallels to the style of analysis in which military officers are trained. Just as Clausewitz saw the value of analyzing both today’s “peculiarities” and timeless elements of war such as “danger,” “exertion,” and “uncertainty,” so does good historical reasoning combine an understanding of continuity and change, Holland writes. He adds that officers are trained in history in professional military education programs and on “staff rides,” where service members study important battles on-site.

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### **Applied History Quote of the Month**

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“He who sees the past as surprise-free is bound to have a future full of surprises.”

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– **Amos Tversky, quoted in Michael Lewis, The Undoing Project: A Friendship That Changed Our Minds (2016)**

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