



The April 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.

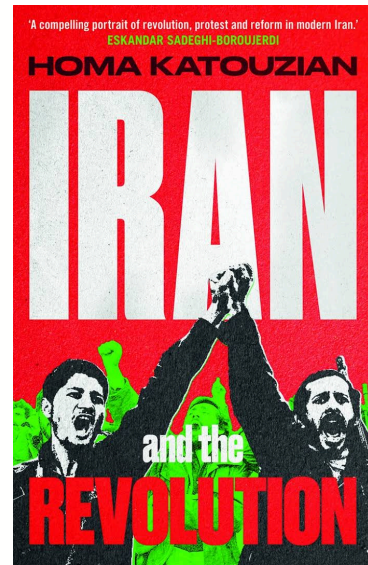
If you would like to submit an item for next month's issue, please email it to aristotle_vainikos@hks.harvard.edu with the subject "May Applied History Update" before June 3.

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

Katouzian Contrasts the 1979 Iranian Revolution with 1789

Iran and the Revolution: A History by **Homa Katouzian** (Faculty Member in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, St Antony's College, University of Oxford) examines the dynamics of the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime and the implications for geopolitics today. With "barricades in the streets, crowds armed with old hunting rifles and kitchen knives facing up to the tanks (British-made, naturally); palaces, barracks and secret police headquarters stormed and sacked," Tehran in 1979 displayed "a genuine revolutionary archetype," nearly one hundred years after the French

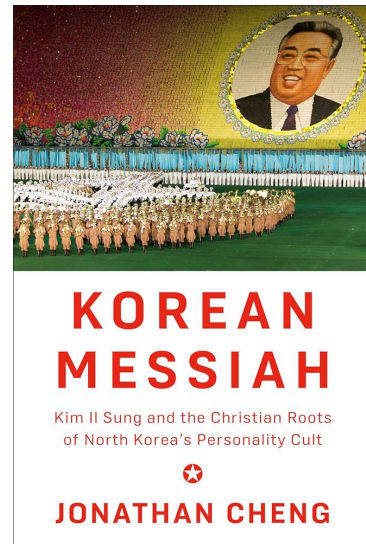
Revolution. Reviewing the book in *The Guardian*, **John Simpson** (world affairs editor, *BBC News*) [writes](#), “When the revolution happened, it electrified Muslims everywhere: they saw it was actually possible to stand up and overthrow the chosen instruments of western policy,” shaped by “heavy-handed British and American imperialism going back decades.” As a Shia Muslim country, Iran and its revolution “had a particularly powerful effect on Shia communities, especially in Lebanon, where Shias in the south of the country had been an underclass since the Crusades... Hezbollah was formed to resist Israel’s encroachments.” However, “as Katouzian makes clear, the political convulsion in Iran didn’t conform to western ideas. Iran... ‘was a society in which change – even important and fundamental change – tended to be a short-term phenomenon. And this was precisely due to the absence of an established and inviolable legal framework which would guarantee long-term continuity.’” Moreover, “All revolutions are accompanied by a degree of self-deception: without that they would never succeed.” In Iran, “the odd alliance between the rebarbative ultra-conservative clergy and the leftwing Iranian intellectuals” led to the delusion “that Ayatollah Khomeini’s return to Tehran would open the door to democracy, liberty of expression and true socialism.” Instead, “Ahead lay chaos, assassinations, terror and an appalling eight-year war (western-encouraged) with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.” Following his ten-year reign, Khomeini handed down “the system, which has lasted, largely unchanged and certainly unmoderated, until today. As Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu are discovering, merely chopping off the regime’s head is absolutely pointless. Its strength goes far deeper than that.” Furthermore, “Israel and the United States between them may have injected a temporary new strength into it with their assaults.” While autocracies are generally brought down by corruption, Iran’s extreme use of force has prolonged its control. Referring to the staying power of the Iranian regime, Simpson concludes, “Katouzian’s warm, rational, highly accessible study will continue to explain the phenomenon long after it has vanished.”



Cheng Posits Christianity as Formative in the Emergence of the Kim Dynasty

Korean Messiah: Kim Il Sung and the Christian Roots of North Korea’s Personality Cult by **Jonathan Cheng** (China bureau chief, *The Wall Street Journal*) explores the role of Christianity in creating and sustaining the cult of personality around North

Korean dictator Kim Il Sung and his son and successor, Kim Jong Il. Reviewing the book in *The Financial Times*, **Rana Mitter** (Chair in US-Asia Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) [notes](#) that beyond the difficulty of lacking access to North Korean archives, which are closed to researchers, a Kim biographer contends with “official histories that tell flamboyant tales of the Kim family’s deeds adorned with appearances by magic animals, unexpected rainbows and even the odd miracle.” However, Cheng’s “stories of miracles are not just kitsch... but are part of a long-underexamined part of the Kim dynasty’s ideology – the influence of Christianity, a faith that once held a grip on the northern part of the Korean peninsula almost as strong as that now enjoyed by the *Juche* (‘self-reliance’) ideology that drives today’s DPRK.” Mitter continues, “The imitation of evangelical religious practice has enabled three generations of Kims to create an atmosphere of unquestioned devotion and normalized the idea of a sacred line of succession that has no justification in Marxist theory.” Christianity was introduced in Korea by a Presbyterian missionary from Indiana in 1889. In 1912, Kim Il Sung was born to Christian parents in a Korea colonized by the Japanese. He became an ardent nationalist and “was surrounded by Christians” during childhood. Though, Mitter notes, “The book is not a complete biography of Kim.” The influence of the Chinese Communist Party, in which he served as a guerrilla fighter during World War II, receives only “brief mentions,” and more needs to be known about the Kim regime, “with its curious mixture of chilling nuclear threat and camp personality cult.” For example, “in the 1970s North Korea dropped almost all references to Marxism in favor of ‘Kimilsungism’, but lack of sources means that the precise reasons for this ideological shift remain a mystery.” Nonetheless, Mitter commends the book’s “rigorous historical use of the Korean sources available for Kim’s early life combined with immense narrative flair.” He concludes that to “look in part to the missionary ventures of the late 19th century is innovative, plausible and genuinely important for a fuller understanding of a regime that continues to shape the balance of power in Asia in the 21st century.”



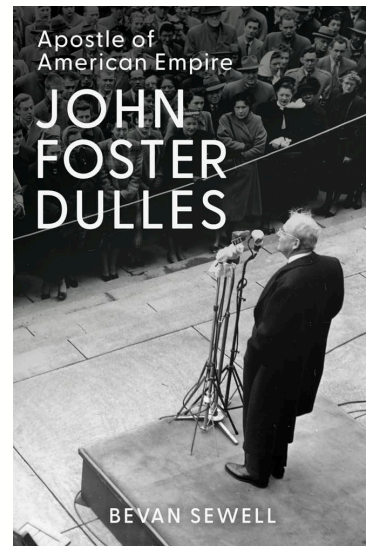
Sewell Places Ecumenism at the Center of John Foster Dulles' Internationalism

John Foster Dulles: Apostle of American Empire by **Bevan Sewell** (Associate Professor in American History, University of Nottingham) is an intellectual history of

an architect of the post-war world whose views were shaped through family, the practice of law, and the study of theology. **Richard Aldous** (Professor of History, Bard College) [reviews](#) the book in *The Wall Street Journal* .

The grandson and nephew of two secretaries of state, John W. Foster and Robert Lansing, Dulles was grounded in international affairs from childhood. In 1907, at the age of nineteen, he served as secretary to his grandfather, Foster, at the Second Hague Peace Conference. “His deep engagement with finding an effective and sustainable international order” began when, as counsel, he accompanied his uncle, Lansing, to the US delegation to the Versailles Peace

Conference. Quoting the author, “Whether it was working for leading Wall Street law firm Sullivan and Cromwell, his involvement in the trans-Atlantic ecumenical movement in the 1930s, his leadership of a major Federal Council of Churches committee charged with setting out a vision of postwar peace in the 1940s, or... his appointment as Eisenhower’s secretary of state,” his goal “was to shape ‘a viable world order.’” Despite an “unglamorous, somewhat dour” demeanor, which prompted the Washington zinger, “Dull, Duller, Dulles,” Sewell portrays him as “a flexible thinker whose approach shifted over time.” After playing a prominent role in Wall Street’s efforts in the 1920s to stabilize the post-war economic order through the Dawes Plan, which fell apart, he began to think more philosophically and spiritually, influenced by discussions with theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and the internationalist intellectual Lionel Curtis. “A spirituality informed by pragmatism... led him to devise the Christian realism that underpinned his vision of American global leadership,” which took form in Dulles’s “Six Pillars of Peace,” written in 1943. Distributed to millions through newspapers and churches, it outlined a postwar blueprint for international political, economic, and military cooperation across nations. Aldous points out that Sewell gives little attention to what Dulles did as Secretary of State. Still, he writes, “What Dulles thought mattered. He kept the U.S. out of any major war and developed a nuclear strategy that evolved from ‘massive retaliation’ to a policy that recognized how an all-or-nothing approach to thermonuclear weapons would be too dangerous.” While commenting that Sewell “is less insightful on Dulles’s political activities than his philosophy,” Aldous observes: “as this book makes clear, “Few of those who came before or after had thought about, or read as much on, the nature of international peace as Dulles had.”



**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

“[How a Cease-Fire Can Lead to Disaster](#)” by Daniel Chardell (Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Texas at Austin’s Clements Center) and Samuel Helfont (Associate Professor, Naval Postgraduate School’s Naval War College Program; Visiting Fellow, Stanford’s Hoover Institution) in *Foreign Affairs*

As Applied Historians analyzing the Iran war, Chardell and Helfont took issue when “observers began invoking a familiar historical analogy” of the 2003 Iraq invasion. Trump “appears to have understood” the problems of US troops fighting in Iran, so, they argue, the better analogy for today is Operation Desert Storm. In 1991, the US “won one of the most decisive military victories in modern history, only to stumble into a decadelong trap of its own making.” Washington destroyed Hussein’s army, “but left his regime in place.” Bush encouraged rebellion, “but neglected to assist.” Chardell and Helfont warn that “Trying to contain Iran [now], as the United States did to Iraq in the 1990s, will inexorably lead to repeated confrontations.” They argue, “The critical error that Bush and Clinton committed in the 1990s was failing to come to terms with Saddam’s regime even after it had complied with American demands. If the United States is to avoid repeating past mistakes, its greatest challenge will lie not in wielding military power but in learning to live with a settlement that leaves the Iranian regime in place.” Two differences between the US’s position today and in 1990 reinforce their recommendation. First, “perhaps the most important difference” is the end of American unipolarity: “A prolonged campaign... would lay bare the limits of U.S. power.” Second, Trump’s “unusual propensity to take unpopular stances... gives him an advantage in navigating the political constraints” that bound Bush and Clinton. For challenging a popular analogy in the headlines and rigorously analyzing an analogy that they consider stronger, Chardell and Helfont’s piece is an Applied History Analysis of the Month.

**[“How to Make Peace in the Middle East”](#) by Shiraz Maher
(Reader, King’s College London’s Department of War Studies) in
*Engelsberg Ideas***

Assessing the tenuous ceasefire in the Iran War, Maher makes the case that the “strongest parallels for the current negotiations come from the aftermath of the 1973 war between Egypt and Israel.” In that case, “neither Egypt nor Israel trusted one another, but the events of recent years had convinced both parties that some form of diplomatic settlement was preferable to a constant cycle of conflict.” One lesson for today’s diplomats, he writes, is that “each side was able to project victory to their domestic audiences.” Sadat could tout that his army landed a blow on Israel; the Israelis were pleased by Ariel Sharon’s successful counteroffensive. Another is the benefit of comprehensive negotiations addressing all the major concerns of each party, as demonstrated by Kissinger’s careful shuttle diplomacy that led to a phased, confidence-building settlement.

The piece is a strong example of seamlessly integrating analysis of history and current events. Maher frames his study of the history with evidence and analysis of decision-making in the US and Iran today, allowing him to make concrete, salient policy recommendations. For example, by first outlining US diplomacy in JD Vance’s words, Maher highlights specific similarities to Kissinger’s tactics in 1973. Maher’s piece is an Analysis of the Month for skillfully connecting an examination of current events with reflection on how similar actions played out in a parallel historical case.

Featured Commentary

Iran: Suez Analogy

**[“How Great Powers Lose Wars They’re Winning”](#) by Niall
Ferguson (Co-Chair, Harvard’s Applied History Project; Senior
Fellow, Stanford’s Hoover Institution) in *The Free Press***

Ferguson argues that for the US to withdraw from Iran before having conclusively opened the Strait of Hormuz would be as damaging to America's reputation as the failure in Suez was for the UK and France. While he acknowledges that no third parties can play the role today that the US and USSR played during the Suez crisis, Ferguson points to the similarities between the US and the UK: an operation without allied support, a large debt burden, and high levels of domestic division. Just as the UK's loss inadvertently drove Nasser's Egypt closer to other Arab countries and to the USSR, so too could the Iran War weaken the US's role in the region and strengthen China and Russia, he writes. Ferguson also co-authored a [piece](#) with **Richard Haass** (President Emeritus, Council on Foreign Relations; senior counselor, Centerview Partners) and **Philip Zelikow** (Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) suggesting the outlines of an Iran War peace settlement.

[2026 Cohen Lecture](#) with **Nicholas Burns (former US Ambassador to China; Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations, Harvard Kennedy School) at the University of Maine**

During his appearance at the University of Maine's 2026 Cohen Lecture, Burns observes, "I think this is the most challenging time that Americans have faced certainly since the end of the Cold War and maybe even before." Asked about the parallel between the Iran War and the 1956 Suez Crisis, Burns notes Suez was "the first great crisis in NATO where the US, the founding country, really stopped two NATO members on a major issue." The lesson: NATO has survived disagreement before and can do so again despite Trump's dissatisfaction with Europe's unwillingness to send ships to the Strait of Hormuz. "This is not the Warsaw Pact," Burns argues—the US is better off working collaboratively with allies than dictating to them.

["Iran is America's Suez Crisis — And Just as Ridiculous"](#) by **Alex von Tunzelmann (historian) in *The Financial Times***

"Compare Suez in 1956 and Iran in 2026," Tunzelmann asks. "Both are farces," she maintains. She assesses that the key decision-makers in each case, Prime Minister

Anthony Eden for Britain and Trump for the US, were “irrational, wrong-headed, and thin-skinned.” For example, personal animus toward Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser was one of the motivations for Eden’s decision to invade. Whether the fate of US influence will mirror Britain’s after Suez remains to be seen, she concludes.

Iran: Global Consequences

“[The Iran Shock](#)” by **Jason Bordoff** (Founding Director, Center on Global Energy Policy, and Professor, Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs) and **Meghan O’Sullivan** (Director, Harvard’s Belfer Center; Professor of the Practice of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Affairs*

After the global economic shock caused by the 1973 oil embargo, advanced economies “concluded that cooperation and market integration could help protect them against the weaponization of energy,” write O’Sullivan and Bordoff. They argue that countries are likely to draw a different lesson from today’s oil shock caused by the Iran War: the need for “energy autarky.” “In today’s fragmented, conflict-prone world...governments will likely try to exert control over their energy systems and insulate their countries from global markets.”

“[How the Iran War Could Backfire](#)” with **Emma Ashford** (Senior Fellow, Stimson Center) on *Reason Podcast*

Ashford argues that 1991 represents a discontinuity in US foreign policy, which shifted from “being relatively conservative—a strategy of mostly defense or containment of the Soviet Union—to this much more transformative, forward-leaning, we’re-going-to-change-the-world approach.” She assesses that this policy has mostly failed, is now unpopular, and has been rejected by the last three US presidents—although they too struggled to narrow America’s commitments abroad.

Asked what explains the shift in US strategy, Ashford points to the “lack of constraints” imposed by a bipolar or multipolar international order.

[“Iran Blockade Sets Up a Test of Which Side Can Endure More Pain”](#) by **David Sanger (White House and national security correspondent) in *The New York Times***

As he awaited Tehran’s response to the US blockade of Iran’s oil exports, Trump faced the same uncertainty that President Kennedy felt in 1962, writes Sanger: “Like President John F. Kennedy’s ‘quarantine’ of Cuba, intended to keep the Soviets from bringing nuclear weapons onto Cuban soil, it is impossible to know beforehand how this will play out.” The UK blockaded the Strait of Hormuz in the 1950s and there were “episodic disruptions” during the Iran-Iraq War, but Sanger argues “none of those experiences is a very close analog to the complex confrontation that is currently unfolding.” Trump’s decision will look “savvy” if Iran folds quickly—but it will appear as another example of poor foresight if the blockade “drags on,” he writes.

US Grand Strategy

[“Nuclear Proliferation and American Security: The Inaugural Carnesale Convenings”](#) with **Graham Allison (Co-Chair, Harvard’s Applied History Project; Professor of Government, Harvard Kennedy School), **Matt Bunn** (Professor of Practice of Energy, National Security, and Foreign Policy, Harvard Kennedy School), **Rose Gottemoeller** (Lecturer, Stanford’s Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies; former Deputy Secretary General, NATO), and **Laura Holgate** (Senior Fellow, Belfer Center; former Ambassador to IAEA) at the IOP Forum moderated by **Meghan O’Sullivan****

Quoting President Kennedy’s expectation that there would be up to 25 nuclear weapon states within a decade, Allison highlights the historical significance of the

nonproliferation regime: “History does have an arc and trendlines frequently continue along the path they were on. JFK's forecast of nuclear anarchy... was not a nutty idea. But that curve has been bent, and we should be thankful for the many, many people who have played some role.” Bunn adds that in the 35 years in which there has been no net increase in nuclear weapon states, there have been multiple secret weapons programs, a global black market, and the chaotic collapse of the Soviet Union. The lesson for today’s policymakers is not to be complacent, according to Bunn. The nonproliferation regime requires active maintenance.

“[Lacing Up LBJ’s Shoes, Trump Is Walking Willingly Into A Trap](#)” with **Fredrik Logevall (Faculty Mentor, Harvard’s Applied History Project; Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) for *Responsible Statecraft***

Reflecting on the Iran war, Logevall agrees with **John Dower’s** (Emeritus Professor of History, MIT) thesis that “language and rhetoric themselves become a prison and the machinery of destruction has its own momentum.” Logevall draws parallels with past US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and goes on to argue, “We certainly see it with respect to Vietnam. U.S. leaders became, as Dower puts it, locked in a prison partly because of... assertions they’ve made about the importance of the struggle.” However, “when Johnson Americanized the conflict, majorities said, ‘Yes, this is the right thing to do.’” Logevall argues that “with Iran, however, it seems pretty clear that most Americans do not back the war. Donald Trump is in a more tenuous position than we’ve seen perhaps with respect to any war that I can think of.” Discussing the subject further with Harvard’s Belfer Center, Logevall [says](#) many presidents since WWII have “taken a page from Truman’s playbook,” taking “advantage of the opportunity to commit American military power without Congressional authorization.” However, “for a major undertaking of the type that we’re in now—this is a major military conflict—you would have seen in the past an effort to bring Congress along and to bring allied governments along. That’s what makes Trump’s approach exceptional.”

“[America in a World of Upheaval](#)” with **William J. Burns (Senior Advisor for Global Affairs, Evercore; former Director, Central Intelligence Agency) for *Foreign Affairs***

Burns argues that a US foreign policy based on the use of “hard power at the expense of soft power” is misguided because “all the major achievements through the Cold War and the post-Cold War era reflected [a blend of both], including the Marshall Plan...and the PEPFAR program.” He laments that “we don’t learn all the lessons that we should” from the past. “The war in 2003 in Iraq seems a little bit distant right now, and it shouldn’t, because the lessons of that experience ought to have been seared in our memory as we weigh choices about decisions like the one the president made five weeks ago to go to war with Iran.”

[“A Grand Strategy of Consolidation”](#) by **A. Wess Mitchell (Fellow, Harvard’s Applied History Project; Principal and Co-Founder, The Marathon Initiative) in *Foreign Affairs***

Mitchell maintains that the US “faces a serious misalignment” between means and ends due to years of unprofitable “peripheral wars” and unchecked spending. His prescription is a grand strategy of consolidation, as practiced historically by Hadrian, Great Britain, and Nixon. He summarizes the British example: “By focusing limited military resources on the main theater, the United Kingdom [at the turn of the 20th century] alleviated the multifront pressure on its empire and put itself on a stronger footing for the coming confrontation with imperial Germany,” he writes. To execute the strategy, the US must accept short-term global instability and “strategic cohabitation” with adversaries while “recharging the country’s batteries” for the long-term.

[“John B. Hurford Memorial Lecture: A Conversation with Stephen Kotkin on America and the World at 250—Where Things Stand and Where They’re Headed”](#) with **Stephen Kotkin (Visiting Scholar, Harvard’s Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford’s Hoover Institution) at the Council on Foreign Relations**

Kotkin argues that “rebalancing” America’s commitments to its overseas allies is an overdue objective in line with the nation’s history. “The plan of the post-World War II order was to reduce America’s power proportionally,” he writes. From investing in allies to propping up former enemies Germany and Japan, the “whole point was to

reduce American power in the world by exercising American power in the world.” Rebalancing today would counteract the worst tendencies introduced by US strategists after the fall of the USSR, who chose to add commitments rather than acknowledge that “we maybe have commitments exceeding [our] power.”

“[Reagan’s Military Lessons for the New Cold War](#),” John Lehman (65th Secretary of the Navy) and Anand Toprani (Assistant Professor of Strategy and Policy, US Naval War College; former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard’s Belfer Center) in *The Wall Street Journal*

“To extract the greatest benefits from higher military spending, we need to remember why the Reagan buildup succeeded.” Asserting that “it takes more than an open checkbook to secure strategic advantages,” Lehman and Toprani list four lessons demonstrating that “leadership is also needed.” First, “the Reagan buildup was modest,” responding to Congress to trim military spending when the deficit swelled. Second, Reagan recognized and was willing to carry forward Carter’s efforts to modernize US forces. “Third, a wider military and grand strategy was developed alongside the buildup.” The Army, Air Force, and Navy developed new doctrines, while Washington empowered allies. “Fourth, the Reagan administration adopted a long-term view.” For example, the Navy controlled growing weapons costs by eliminating sole-source suppliers, fostering competition, and employing fixed-price contracts. Lehman and Toprani conclude: “Since the U.S. is likely closer to the beginning than the end of its competition with China, we must return to those proven reforms to create a force we can sustain over the long term.”

“[Trump’s Impulsive Foreign Policy Is Tearing Apart the Global Order](#)” with Daniel Immerwahr (Professor of History, Northwestern University) for *Mother Jones*

Immerwahr argues that Trump sees US foreign policy priorities differently from his predecessors, whose view was that (paraphrasing a line from the 9/11 Commission Report) “the American homeland is the planet—everything, everywhere matters for the US.” But instead of acting with more restraint as a result, Trump has intervened abroad due to a “nihilism” about the consequences of his actions, Immerwahr

claims. Whereas George W. Bush presented reasons and evidence for invading Iraq and brought allies on board to ensure the war “didn’t disrupt other US interests,” Trump has adopted a “hit and run strategy” that leaves problems for others to fix, Immerwahr says.

[“The Warmongers Are Getting History All Wrong”](#) by **Stewart Patrick (Senior Fellow and Director, Global Order and Institutions Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) in *The New York Times***

Concluding that Trump administration officials would benefit from “a closer reading of Thucydides,” Patrick argues, “The Trump administration’s relentless bullying ignores a central lesson from classical antiquity: Athens’s shift from benevolent hegemony to malevolent empire paved its road to ruin.” What is the outlook for Trump’s foreign policy? “As in Thucydides’ time, this posture promises short-term gains but long-run disaster,” predicts Patrick.

[“‘Hubris’ Review: When Athens Became an Empire”](#) by **Brendan Boyle (Associate Dean for Graduate Programs, St. John’s College) in *The Wall Street Journal***

In his review of **David Stuttard’s** (Fellow, Goodenough College, London; classicist) new book, *Hubris*, about the decline of Athens, Boyle also hints at a lesson from ancient history for today’s superpowers: “Arrogance, greed and misjudgment were, and remain, enough to account for Athens’—or any nation’s—demise.” *Hubris* argues that after a “mostly peaceful, decades-long hegemony,” Athens “‘mutated’ into an empire” that bullied allies, overspent on lavish projects, and used force without foresight (as in Sicily). Athens became, Stuttard writes, “a beacon of democracy that ruled an empire like a tyrant with an iron fist.”

[“Today’s Eerie Echoes of the First World War”](#) with **Odd Arne Westad (Professor of History and Global Affairs, Yale University) on *UnHerd***

Host **Freddie Sayers** asks Westad to address the Cold War II analogy previously argued by **Niall Ferguson** on *UnHerd*. “I think he’s wrong for three main reasons,” Westad responds. First, “It’s multipolar rather than bipolar.” Second, “the competition among these great powers now takes place within the same economic system.” Finally, “this doesn’t have the ideological divides that the Cold War was infamous for.” Speaking with **Bonny Lin** (Director, China Power Project and Senior Adviser, CSIS), Westad [adds](#) that “One of the things that really frightens me compared to the situation that led to war in 1914 is that we now seem to have learned very few lessons about arms control and confidence-building measures,” he argues. “There is almost nothing of that now, and nothing at all between the United States and China.” Discussing the subject of Taiwan with **Michael Feinberg** (Senior Editor, *Lawfare*), Westad [says](#), “My guess is that the Taiwan conflict is going to be unresolved for a very, very long time. What we can do is to move it away from the brink of war... and that is what [*The Coming Storm*] is calling for.”

[“History Lessons? China, America, and the Danger of War”](#) by **Philip Zelikow in *Times Literary Supplement***

Zelikow critiques **Odd Arne Westad’s** *The Coming Storm*, arguing that the “whole analogical construct of China as Germany vs the US as the British Empire is unsound.” He writes that it is more accurate to understand Britain’s complex foreign policy in terms of its concern with a rising Russia and dual efforts to restrain Germany and France. Zelikow finds that China’s militarization better mirrors the war preparations that Hitler and Stalin began in 1937 and 1938. Indeed, Zelikow argues that Xi Jinping is reminiscent of Stalin. He also notes an analogy between Trump and Germany’s King Wilhelm II.

[Defending Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War with China](#) by Eyck Freymann (Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution), published by Oxford University Press

Freyermann's new book argues that the US must develop an "integrated strategy" of economic tools as well as military capabilities to deter a Taiwan crisis that begins below the level of war, such as a Chinese quarantine. History teaches that the economic consequences of such a crisis could be far-reaching, he [writes](#) in an accompanying *Foreign Affairs* article. For example, the outbreak of WWI disrupted trade and gold flows, triggering a financial crash; the London Stock Exchange was closed for more than six months. Freymann argues that the US's strategy should maintain the One China Policy while deepening engagement with Taiwan, rebuilding the US defense industrial base, modernizing US nuclear forces, and implementing "avalanche decoupling."

["The US Could Lose the Space Race to China"](#) by Stephen Buono (Assistant Professor of Humanities, University of Florida; former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center) in *The Wall Street Journal*

Buono argues that the US government's current Artemis missions are not "a replay of 1969." Far from a finite mission to put people on the moon, "It's a contest over governance, access to critical resources, and the ability to establish infrastructure that will determine economic and military activity in space for generations." Acknowledging that the differences will help the US government craft an effective appeal to the American people, he writes: "Artemis missions won't matter if voters think the moon is yesterday's achievement...Washington must make the case in terms the public appreciates: power, prosperity and security."

["The Age of Polycrisis: Economics, Climate & Geopolitics in the 21st Century"](#) by Adam Tooze (Professor of History, Columbia University) for Simon Fraser University's 2026 Munro Lecture

“As a historian,” Tooze says in early April as war with Iran escalated, “I go back to my intellectual ancestors.” He invokes philosopher of history Reinhart Koselleck, who was among German troops captured by the Red Army near the end of WWII and put to work clearing up Auschwitz. Koselleck was then deported to a Soviet gulag before returning to Germany in the late 1940s. “Looking back at European history, he asked this question of what happens when the space of experience and the horizon of expectation that we carry before ourselves at all times ruptures and the reality that we face contains things like the threat by the President of the United States to erase Persian civilization.” Condemning Trump’s threats through this comparison, Tooze argues: “That is not a horizon of expectation that any reasonable person should carry before themselves. That is what we were thinking about yesterday. Yesterday.”

Europe

“[What’s Britain’s Place in the Post-Iran World Order?](#)” John Bew (Senior Fellow, Harvard’s Belfer Center; Professor of History and Foreign Policy, King’s College London) in *The Spectator*

Bew argues that the Labour government’s initial decision to prevent the use of UK bases for US offensive attacks on Iran is informed by lessons from the British role in Iraq. “Keir Starmer is all too aware of the electoral price Labour paid when his predecessor Tony Blair decided to side with a Republican president in a Middle Eastern war,” Bew writes. “When the Prime Minister talks about ‘the lessons of Iraq’ he is thinking not just of the risks of regime change abroad, he is also seeking to safeguard his own position at home.”

“[How Congress Can Help Ukraine](#)” by Brendan Simms (Director and Strand Leader, University of Cambridge’s Centre for Geopolitics) and Edward Siddle (researcher) in *Foreign Affairs*

Drawing on previous cases in which Congress acted separately from the President to shape foreign policy, Simms and Siddle argue that today’s Congress can play an

important role in strengthening Ukraine's negotiating position. The two cases: in 1979, Congress passed the consequential Taiwan Relations Act to preserve US ties to Taiwan despite President Carter's decision to withdraw diplomatic recognition; in 1995, Congress helped push President Clinton to act in Bosnia by voting to lift an arms embargo (which Clinton vetoed). Today, the authors suggest, Congress could pass a "Ukraine Relations Act" with security guarantees that direct US policy and give Ukraine more diplomatic cards to play. Simms also [wrote](#) about Churchill's legacy and historical memory.

[“Inside London’s Chinese Embassy”](#) by **Oliver Yule-Smith (Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard’s Belfer Center; Visiting Fellow, Centre for Statecraft and National Security, King’s College London) for *History Today***

Given “calls for the need to increase Chinese investment in the UK amid shifting American trade policies,” Yule-Smith suggests that for countries like the UK facing the two sides of the US-China rivalry today, history does not always help make the choice straightforward. “As ever, the Anglo-Chinese relationship is complex and highly nuanced; this is not the first time that the diplomatic mission has been at the centre of a flashpoint.” For example, “in 1966, the destinies of the Chinese mission on Portland Place and the respective British mission on Guanghua Road became intertwined.” Attacks at both diplomatic buildings “would linger over the Chinese mission” for years to come.

US Politics

[“I Took to the Road and Found Hope for America”](#) by **Beverly Gage (Professor of History, Yale University) in *The Atlantic***

In an essay adapted from her new book published this month, *This Land is Your Land: A Road Trip Through U.S. History*, Gage recommends the journey that she undertook to write it: “For anyone nervous about the country, hitting the road and

learning about its history this semiquincentennial year might provide some existential comfort, because they will see that Americans have managed to get themselves out of big messes before. At the very least, it makes it harder to say that things today are worse than ever. Among its other fine qualities, the past offers tools for thinking about how to create change in situations where the odds look daunting.”

[“AAS Faculty in Conversation: ‘Race, History, and Memory in the 250th Year of the U.S.’”](#) with **Khalil Gibran Muhammad (Professor of African American Studies and Public Affairs) and **Eddie S. Glaude Jr.** (Distinguished University Professor) at Princeton University**

“A kind of recurring mythology in the country is that we are judging people in the past by our standards today.” Yet, “anti-slavery ideas were in circulation in the Atlantic world at least as far back as the 15th century,” Muhammad argues, countering those today who have tried arguing that civil rights advocates have made unfair demands that do not consider the realities of past periods. “So, this idea that we can’t judge the past by our standards fails the empirical test.” To better understand the historical movie in which today’s domestic political tensions along racial lines are just one snapshot, Muhammad says that “in any generational moment, in any cohort of people, there are people who say, ‘This is wrong and I won’t abide it and I won’t participate.’”

[“Move Fast, Break Things: The Policy Origins of Today’s AI Race”](#) by **Nur Laiq (Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard’s Belfer Center) at Harvard’s Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society**

Referring to the “intertwined relationship” between the AI industry and a Trump administration intent on deregulation, Laiq notes: “We often treat this as something new, something Trumpian, as if the intimate international moment between tech and the state only really began with the arrival of Trump, the billionaires, and AI.” But she argues that the trend extends back to the 1980s, when US state governments raced to incentivize investment by high-tech companies—aiming to create the next Silicon Valley. The big bets, many of which failed, tell “a familiar story where there’s a lack of

investment in education, as we see today, and all other forms of investment in economic growth and development are being ignored as we pursue this AI race.”

Economy

“The World’s Anti-Recession Guardrails Are Weaker Than Ever” with **Carmen Reinhart (Professor of the International Financial System, Harvard Kennedy School) for *Bloomberg***

The title of **Kenneth Rogoff** (Professor of Economics, Harvard University) and Reinhart’s landmark book, *This Time is Different*, “mocked the speculators, politicians and pundits pushing the idea that any moment in history can defy economic gravity,” *Bloomberg* [argues](#). Therefore, “it’s worth paying attention when Reinhart says she’s worried that the world today is the least prepared it’s been in decades to respond to a meltdown.” In Reinhart’s words: “This is the worst place we’ve been in 20 years” —and the period since the global economy was last in such dire straits is likely “longer than that.” Central banks “were heroes during the global financial crisis [and] the pandemic.” But, Reinhart says, “I don’t think they can be heroes now.” Reinhart also [presented](#) “States as Financiers: International Lending in War and Peace,” in which she and coauthors **Sebastian Horn** (Professor of Economics, University of Hamburg) and **Christoph Trebesch** (Professor of Economics and Director of the Research Center on International Finance, Kiel Institute) gather 1.1 million cases of government-to-government lending over the past 235 years to find that “Time and again, official international lending has helped avert military defeat or financial collapse abroad.”

Applied History Methods

[“The 36th Annual Lionel Gelber Prize Ceremony and Lecture”](#) by **Francis J. Gavin (Distinguished Professor and Inaugural Director, Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins’ SAIS) at the University of Toronto’s Munk School**

“History offers no simple off-the-shelf storybook lessons,” Gavin says, reflecting on writing his prize-winning book *Thinking Historically*. “The same officials in the Johnson administration who developed the United States’ policy in Vietnam in 1964 and 1965—arguably America’s most disastrous grand strategic decision after World War II—concurrently developed what is arguably its wisest: a radical nuclear non-proliferation policy that, against all expectations, has helped ensure that the bomb has not been used in battle and is in the hands of less than 10 states, an unimaginable outcome 60 years ago.” Gavin provides another example: “In the same 2003 State of the Union speech where President George W. Bush laid out the case for the disastrous invasion of Iraq, he announced the president’s emergency plan for AIDS relief, which some estimated has saved over 20 million lives.” Gavin concludes that “History is full of ironies, complexities, and unexpected connections. Recognizing these tensions generated an empathy for the individuals who found themselves in positions of responsibility.”

[“A Case Study in Applied History: Commissioning Historical Papers for the UK’s National Security Secretariat”](#) by **Andrew Ehrhardt (Lecturer in Foreign Policy and Director of Research & Programmes, Centre for Statecraft and National Security, King’s College London; Fellow, Harvard’s Belfer Center), **Maeve Ryan** (Reader in History and Foreign Policy, Centre for Statecraft and National Security, King’s College London) and **Oliver Yule-Smith** with Foreword by **Graham Allison** for the Applied History Project at Harvard’s Belfer Center**

In a paper introducing a compendium of historical case studies commissioned by the UK National Security Secretariat in 2019, now made available to the public, Ehrhardt, Ryan, and Yule-Smith report that “we looked to history to see what precedents existed for the strategic challenge the UK government had set itself – and what cautionary tales officials might learn from.” Focusing on past “strategic resets” to inform the UK government’s Integrated Review, the case studies—ranging from China’s post-WWII strategic resets to Malta’s recent adoption of Blockchain—

found, for example, that “Strategic resets must take account of existing political realities” and that “Realignments require the buy-in of key stakeholders, but first and foremost the national public.”

Network Updates

“[Applied History Today](#)” with **Graham Allison, Niall Ferguson, and John Bew hosted by the Hoover Applied History Working Group (Stanford’s Hoover Institution) in partnership with the Applied History Project (Harvard’s Belfer Center)**

Marking the 10th anniversary since Allison and Ferguson [published](#) the Applied History Manifesto, they hosted a conversation with their colleague Bew about where the Applied History movement stands today. Allison reminded viewers of Applied History’s objective: “We did not imagine that historians would have a crystal ball to see the future. The competition is simply what others would do in trying to illuminate those same challenges and choices without *resorting* to history.” He highlighted the movement’s expansion to over a dozen major institutional nodes and a network of over 600 scholars, and offered suggestions for future work: “a basic toolbox of teachable skills for Applied History,” embracing financial analysis as a form of Applied History, and considering how to relate to university history departments. Pulling the thread on financial analysis and reflecting on his experience leading the advisory firm Greenmantle, Ferguson argued: “What we need to show is that Applied History works in the marketplace because in the marketplace you are held to account if you are wrong. It becomes clear a great deal more rapidly and with more painful consequences than if you are wrong in the academy.” Bew advocated for a “broad church approach” to the Applied History movement, with room for scholars from different backgrounds “debating with each other the veracity or the effectiveness of our analogies.”

“History and Statecraft: The Applied History Conference” hosted by the Engelsberg Applied History Programme, Centre for Statecraft and National Security (King’s College London), Centre for Geopolitics (University of Cambridge), Hoover History Lab

(Stanford's Hoover Institution), and Applied History Project (Harvard's Belfer Center)

On April 9, **Andrew Ehrhardt**, **Oliver Yule-Smith**, **Joseph Ledford** (Fellow and Hoover History Lab Assistant Director, Stanford's Hoover Institution), and **Hugo Bromley** (Applied History Research Fellow, University of Cambridge's Centre for Geopolitics) hosted "History and Statecraft," an Applied History conference at the University of Cambridge supported by the Engelsberg Applied History Programme. To tee up the day-long series of discussions, the committee wrote that "Conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific, and concerns over whether major international organisations, notably the United Nations and World Trade Organisation, remain fit for purpose have upended long-held assumptions about the stability of regional and international orders. Within the next decade, new alignments and postures will set the foundation of regional and international ordering structures. These realities call for a renewal of traditional statecraft, an approach rooted in deep historical knowledge and understanding. It is therefore an appropriate time to reflect on the Applied History movement, launched a decade ago with the publication of Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson's Applied History Manifesto, and where it should go next."

Hoover Applied History Working Group Introduces Inaugural Griffin Fellows

The Hoover Applied History Working Group [announced](#) the appointment of seven Griffin Fellows, "selected for their exceptional ability to produce historically grounded research that informs contemporary policymaking." The group has expertise across several areas, including recessions, sanctions, the Western Hemisphere, the Black Sea, semiconductors, and decentralized finance. The Fellowship, launched with the support of **Kenneth C. Griffin** (CEO, Citadel), enables each recipient to work on a specific research project and publish the results. The Fellows are: **Tyler Goodspeed**, **Nick Lambert**, **Joseph Ledford**, **Chris Miller**, **Mike Nichter**, **Manny Rincon-Cruz**, and **Ziyi "Emily" Wang**. Additionally, Ledford has been appointed the Clements Center's Director of Research at the University of Texas at Austin.

Ambassador William C. Battle Symposium on American Diplomacy

The Miller Center [held](#) its annual Ambassador William C. Battle Symposium on American Diplomacy to discuss "US strategy for a new era" of geopolitics involving technological disruption, the "arrival of China as a peer competitor," and "America's

own rebellion against the international order that it has sustained for 80 years.” A keynote conversation featured former directors of the State Department’s Office of Policy Planning **Peter Berkowitz** and **Anne-Marie Slaughter**. In another session, **Alexander Bick** (Associate Professor of Practice in Public Policy, University of Virginia) and **Stephen Wertheim** (Senior Fellow, American Statecraft Program) argued that the US is “overburdened” abroad and weighed the appropriate pillars for a better US grand strategy. **A. Wess Mitchell** took part in the final panel on “Rules or Primacy,” discussing the ordering principles of international relations today.

Applied History Quote of the Month

“Though analogy is often misleading, it is the least misleading thing we have.”

– **Samuel Butler**, *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler* (1912)

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