View this email in your browser

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

Applied History Network Newsletter

August 2026

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

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

If you would like to submit an item for next month's issue, please email it to aristotle_vainikos@hks.harvard.edu with the subject "September Applied History Update" by October 6.

In This Issue:

Applied History Analyses of the Month

"AI and the Historian" with **John Lewis Gaddis** (Professor of Military and Naval History, Yale University) in *The Politic*

Gaddis argues AI is creating a "substantial intellectual revolution" that "reinforces the validity of the historical approach." In fact, the way in which AI identifies useful patterns in mountains of data is similar to the way that historians think, he proposes. Gaddis predicts that AI as a tool for organizing and analyzing data will both accelerate historical research and help policymakers form a "three-hundred-sixty-degree view" of strategic challenges and choices, which he analogizes to the role that the famed Office of Net Assessment currently plays in government. But Gaddis acknowledges AI can err or be overly deferential—so, he teaches students to "interrogate" AI-generated answers, including by asking the model to "toughen up."

Gaddis's remarks offer a helpful analysis of historical reasoning and a provocative assessment of how a major modern discontinuity—AI—both preserves and enhances it. He clearly describes how the historian's skillset of "looking at everything in relation to everything else" is relevant to strategic decision-making. Gaddis's reflections on integrating AI into curricula for training today's historians illuminate the way forward for educators across the Applied History Network training the next generation of decisionmakers.

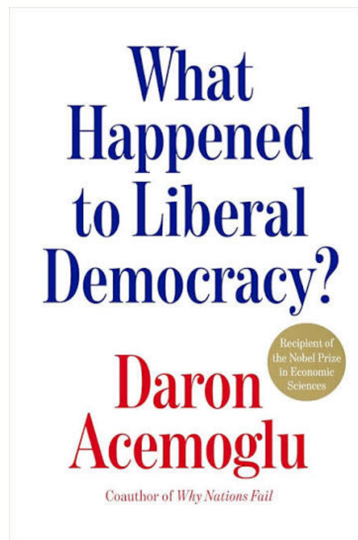
"America's Cosmic Bet on AI" by **Graham Allison** (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Professor of Government, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Policy*

Allison highlights the US economy's highly leveraged bet on the successful development of AI—with AI driving half of the country's growth, business investment, and the value of equity markets—and argues that the collapse of the AI boom would pose "grave" risk to US wealth and national security. He notes that AI companies' outsized valuations and the scale of investment are comparable to recent historical bubbles, such as in 2000, that sparked recessions when they burst. To illuminate the national security implications of a slowdown in the AI industry, Allison examines China's response to the US financial crash in 2008. It was a "decisive learning moment" for Xi Jinping, and one of several reasons that China has chosen to place a "strikingly different," more balanced bet in the unfolding AI race.

The piece is a good demonstration of applying history to gauge the size and importance of a current phenomenon often characterized as unprecedented. While no two bubbles or recessions are identical, data points from historical analogies—

such as the piece's evaluation of how crashes in 1929, 2000, and 2008 affected the economy—can help in outlining potential outcomes of today's AI investment. Allison also shows how history can offer insight into current challenges for which reliable or insider data is sparse, such as interpreting China's strategy and behavior in the AI race.

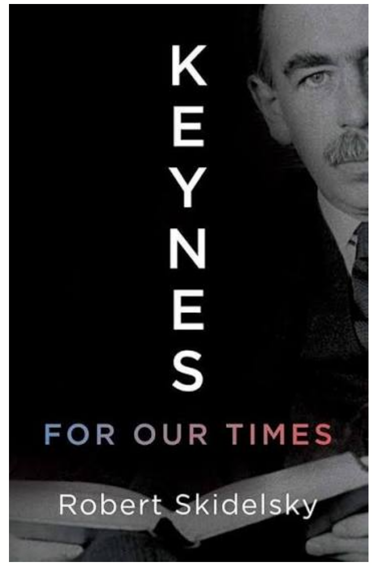
Recent History Books Illuminating Today's Headline Challenges and Choices*



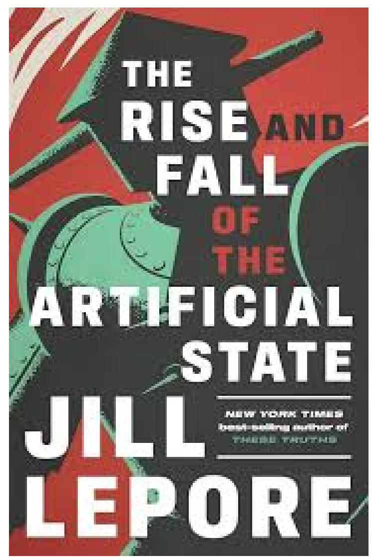
What Happened to Liberal Democracy? Remaking a Politics of Shared Prosperity by **Daron Acemoglu** (Institute Professor and Stone Center Faculty Co-Director, MIT): Acemoglu distinguishes multiple historical conceptions of liberalism, including the tradition of "non-domination"—that government must help protect citizens from big private actors—to which he subscribes. He proposes a refined "working-class liberalism" that supports policy experimentation and freedom of speech but employs redistribution and harnesses technology to create jobs. In his review, **Martin Wolf** (chief economics commentator, *The Financial Times*) calls the book "timely" and "thought-provoking" but expresses skepticism that today's governments are equipped to constrain powerful technology companies, unite a diverse citizenry, or arrest democratic backsliding.

Keynes for Our Times by **Robert Skidelsky** (economic historian; former UK House of Lords member): In his final book before passing, Skidelsky argues for a "'modernized Keynesianism' capable of maintaining 'a continuously high level of labor demand'" through redistribution, public works projects, and public sector employment. Skidelsky outlines the economic policy disagreements between Keynes and Friedrich Hayek—who both nonetheless desired to "preserve liberal civilization from the radicals of the left and right," a crusade from which politicians might learn as they combat populism and nationalism today, he writes. In his review, **Samuel Gregg** (Chair in Economics and Economic History, American Institute for

Economic Research) praises Skidelsky's insight into Keynes's life and ideas but critiques his treatment of Hayek and questions the feasibility of a maximum-employment economic policy.



The Rise and Fall of the Artificial State by **Jill Lepore** (Professor of American History and Professor of Law, Harvard University): Lepore "examines what happens when we abandon liberal democracy for rule by automation and machines," summarizes **Jennifer Szalai** in *The New York Times*. What began as a "'perfectly sensible' desire to make government run more smoothly and efficiently" has become an overreliance on numerical data and digital products sold by big companies, she argues, "devaluing and degrading human wisdom." In an article excerpting the book, Lepore traces the recent evolution of techno-utopian views, from the early computer era of the 1950s to the "messianic" techno-libertarianism of the 1990s that continues to influence Silicon Valley leaders.



**This section was inspired by Paul Kennedy and his wide experience in writing book reviews.*

Featured Commentary

Geoeconomics

"The Long Shadow of the Iran Shock" by Jason Bordoff (Founding Director of the Center on Global Energy Policy and Professor of Professional Practice, Columbia's SIPA) and Meghan L. O'Sullivan (Director, Harvard's Belfer Center; Professor of the Practice of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Affairs*

Noting that the global economy has weathered the effects of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz better than many analysts anticipated, Bordoff and O'Sullivan assess similarities and differences between the present situation and the 1973 oil crisis. They argue that because America's economy is less oil dependent and the US makes more money from oil exports than in the 1970s, Hormuz's closure has slowed US growth by much less—perhaps 1/20th—than it would have in 1973. But, just as the 1973 oil shock accelerated investment in non-fossil fuel sources of energy, they suggest the current shock could further encourage a shift to green energy. They conclude that the threat to the global economy has not passed, since some of the "cushions" that so far prevented a major crisis are fraying.

"Trump's Threats Against Canada Are Self-Defeating" by **Robert Zoellick** (Senior Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center; former US Trade Representative, Deputy Secretary of State, and President of the World Bank) in *The Financial Times*

Zoellick objects to Trump's new tariffs on Canada by reviewing both the recent history of economic integration between the two countries and their multi-decade partnership in foreign policy. He notes: "President Ronald Reagan recognised that an integrated North America offers the US a firmer continental foundation for projecting influence globally." Presidents from both parties then deepened ties, with positive outcomes for investment and opportunity in all three countries. Zoellick adds: "No American leader should dishonour the country's past by treating our closest partners so shabbily," listing multiple occasions since the world wars in which Canada and America "stood arm-in-arm."

On Trade War by **Craig VanGrasstek** (trade historian) published by Cambridge University Press

Previously commissioned by the World Trade Organization in 2013 to author its official history, VanGrasstek now examines the US trade war with China, the single largest beneficiary of WTO accession, in his latest book. Rather than an unprecedented event, as many have claimed, "This radical break from the recent past can instead be seen as a reversion to the historical mean," writes VanGrasstek. He argues today's trade war could be as dangerous as precedents from the history of great power rivalry. Citing **Graham Allison's** *Destined for War*: "The United States and China are already engaged in a trade war, and the Peloponnesian War showed how short may be the leap from that form of conflict to the lethal type."

"D-Day Dreaming: Why Economic Blockades Miss the Mark" by **Peter Mansoor** (Chair of Military History, The Ohio State University) in Military History in the News

As part of the Hoover Institution's series of short articles using history to illuminate breaking news, Mansoor considers the probable outcomes of Trump's blockade of

Iran by highlighting the challenges that economic blockades have faced in the past. For example, Napoleon's Continental System failed to secure the support of all key parties in Europe and struggled to eliminate smuggling. His analysis of US sanctions against Iraq after the Gulf War indicates that elites can insulate themselves via black markets while the public bears the burden. This month, Mansoor also wrote about the timeline of joint exercises between US and South Korean forces and compared Trump's Iran strategy to Churchill's ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign.

"The 'Stability-Instability Paradox' Comes for Markets" by **Emma Ashford** (Senior Fellow, Stimson Center; Adjunct Assistant Professor, Georgetown University) and **Matthew Rojansky** (President and CEO, U.S. Russia Foundation; Visiting Scholar, Dartmouth College) in *Foreign Policy*

As the Iran war continues, Ashford and Rojansky argue that global markets may be experiencing a version of the Cold War "stability-instability paradox." Nuclear deterrence reduced the danger of direct US-Soviet war but created more room for proxy conflicts and crises below the nuclear threshold. Today, energy reserves, bypass pipelines, excess supply, and reduced Chinese demand have cushioned an initial oil shock, encouraging confidence that escalation remains manageable. They warn that those buffers are being depleted, and resilience may encourage the risk-taking that produces a larger crisis. This month, Ashford also argued weak checks on presidential war-making and Americans' insulation from its costs repeatedly draw the US into conflicts that are easier to start than end.

Technology

"Elon's Favorite Sci-Fi Prophet Was Wrong" by **Niall Ferguson** (Co-Chair, Harvard's Applied History Project; Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution) in *The Free Press*

Ferguson reflects on ways of "understanding the full range of imaginable outcomes" of today's rapid AI development, of which applying history is one—and reading science fiction is another. History can inform science fiction. Describing insights from Neal Stephenson's writing, Ferguson notes: "A leitmotif of Stephenson's work is that new technology nearly always has unintended, often adverse consequences," such as in the internet era. "It's now more than 30 years…and yet back then Stephenson could already visualize a world in which AI creates such wide social inequalities that the techno-elite have to reinvent themselves as 'Neo-Victorians,' complete with 19th-century mannerisms."

"Critics of the U.S.-Saudi Nuclear Deal Have It Exactly Wrong" by Daniel Poneman (Board of Directors, Council on Foreign Relations; former Deputy Secretary, US Department of Energy) in *The New York Times*

Poneman disputes the accusation that the newly announced US-Saudi nuclear deal contains insufficient safeguards, instead tracing the history of US nuclear exports to show that the US has mandated the most rigorous safety protocols in the world since the 1978 Nuclear Nonproliferation Act. The "gold standard" provision on which many pundits focus is in fact an anomaly—just two of the US's 24 nuclear agreements include the pledge that the recipient never enrich uranium. Moreover, Poneman emphasizes that the history offers a compelling argument for the deal: US competitors offering nuclear technology with fewer strings attached will fill the void. In the 1970s, France and West Germany used promises of less stringent contracts to battle US companies for nuclear deals in Pakistan, Brazil, and others—just as China and Russia are actively pursuing deals abroad today, he argues.

"AI vs The People" by Jill Lepore in *The Financial Times*

Lepore reviews historical analogies that offer evidence for the proposition that "rules designed to make something safer sometimes also make it safer, better, cheaper and faster," disputing complaints from Silicon Valley that regulation invariably stifles innovation. Though government was at first slow to act, the adoption of cars in the early 1900s gradually motivated new types of taxation; changes to jurisprudence; and legislation around licenses, speed limits, and traffic patterns, she writes. She adds that government can also be proactive without squashing new technology. For example, Congress imposed "strict" guidelines on the development of radio and airplanes in the 1920s and 1930s— “and no one argued that the aeroplane and the radio developed too slowly.”

“Social Media and the Myth of the Big Tobacco Moment” by **David Streitfeld** (reporter) in *The New York Times*

As Meta went to federal court over its marketing practices, many asked: “Was this social media’s Big Tobacco moment, a historic occasion when a once-popular pastime gets kicked to the curb by the combined judgments of regulators, courts and activists?” Streitfeld argues that this view misinterprets the history of regulating Big Tobacco; social media critics disappointed with the Meta settlement “were chasing a myth," he writes. “‘Today is not the beginning of the end for social media, any more than 1998 was the beginning of the end of Big Tobacco,’” says interviewee **Robert Proctor** (Professor of History, Stanford University). “‘Americans still smoke more than 170 billion cigarettes every year, and inhale tons of additional nicotine from ‘electronic’ variants. How easily we forget!’”

Markets and Growth

“The AI Growth Paradox: Why High Productivity Could Still Lead to a Crash” by **Kenneth S. Rogoff** (Professor of Economics, Harvard University) in *Foreign Affairs*

Rogoff assesses the claim that AI will help decrease US debt, which surpassed $40 trillion in August. “As evidence, many point to the 1990s, when the tech boom played a big role in helping the Clinton administration move toward a balanced budget and ward off market concerns about U.S. debt levels.” But Rogoff challenges that analogy based on key differences between then and now: capital’s share of income is greater than labor’s share, but capital is harder to tax today than before. “So even as the economy grows, long-run tax revenues are unlikely to keep pace,” Rogoff warns.

"[Walking on a Fragile Fiscal Cliff]" with **Douglas Elmendorf (Professor of Public Policy and former Dean, Harvard Kennedy School) on The Concord Coalition's *Facing the Future***

Where did this $40 trillion debt come from? Appetite grows by what it feeds on, Elmendorf explains: "in our history, we've realized as we get richer, we want more highways and more of this and more of that." Today's annual deficit, he argues, is unprecedented. "We have no history in relative peacetime, out of a depression, with the federal government borrowing that much money"—roughly 6% of GDP. "In wars, yes. In depressions, yes, but not in the economic conditions and the global conditions we find today. And if we're borrowing this much now, you imagine what would happen if we actually were attacked, or the economy collapsed," Elmendorf concludes. "So that's very worrying."

"[The Pitfalls of Proprietarianism]" by **Nicholas Mulder (Associate Professor of History, Cornell University) in *Weltinnenpolitik***

Mulder expands strategic imagination for economic policymakers by raising historical examples of expropriation which show that property rights are not the be-all-end-all for economic development. "To put it in anachronistic contemporary terms, historically both NIMBY and YIMBY policies were needed to sustain economic development," he argues. For example, "the problem of the Middle Ages was often not insecure property, but precisely excessively entrenched property and use rights, often privately defended and upheld, which hampered capital formation and development."

"[King Donald is Dethroning the Dollar]" by **Barry Eichengreen (Professor of Economics and Political Science, University of California, Berkeley) in *The New York Times***

"Doubts about the dollar's staying power are not entirely new," Eichengreen acknowledges. For example, even eminent economic historian Charles Kindleberger predicted the dollar was "finished" amid the shocks of the Nixon era. But Eichengreen identifies differences between the 1970s and today's situation which make dollar dominance shakier than before. Above all, he argues "every leading international currency has been backed by a strong financial institution insulated from politics"—while Trump threatens the US Federal Reserve's independence today. Similarly, China and Europe are actively advancing alternatives to the dollar.

"Law Versus Development" by **Kevin Byrne Keller** (Associate Professor of Law, University of Missouri-Kansas City; former Ernest May Fellow in History and Policy, Harvard's Belfer Center) in *Sinica*

To frame his review of **Miriam Driessen's** (Departmental Lecturer in Social Anthropology, University of Oxford) new book, *Immunity on Trial* , Keller highlights the role the US legal system played in helping manage the societal disruption from new technologies such as the railroad in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He writes: "The legal regime we in the United States have inherited from that era is the result of decades of debate over the following questions: How much pain should be tolerated in the name of economic growth? And who should bear it?" Driessen's book about Chinese infrastructure projects in Ethiopia considers the same questions in a different location and context, he writes.

US Grand Strategy

"How Alliances Survive" by **Kurt M. Campbell** (Chairman and Co-Founder, Asia Group; former Deputy Secretary of State) and **Rush Doshi** (Director, China Strategy Initiative, Council on Foreign Relations; Assistant Professor, Georgetown's Walsh School) in *Foreign Affairs*

Comparing the current health of US alliances to challenges they faced during the Cold War, Campbell and Doshi argue that pessimism is overblown—American alliances have seen worse. Campbell and Doshi argue two pressures—converging threat perceptions and the gravitational pull of common economic, technological, and military needs—will encourage sustained cooperation. They contend America needs its allies. “At a time when the United States needs its allies more than ever, forbearance is essential. They are, after all, the only allies Americans have.”

“Why the United States Keeps Losing Wars” by Stephen M. Walt (Professor of International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) in *Foreign Policy*

Walt argues the reasons the US has lost recent wars are “strategic and structural”: “the country has been waging wars of choice that combine modest US interests with extremely ambitious goals.” He draws his conclusion from a comparison of the US experiences in Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan—in contrast to the Gulf War, the anomalous US military victory in which the US prudently pursued limited war aims, he writes. He concludes, “There won’t be a lot of conflicts where truly vital interests are at stake, and major sacrifices—such as those that Americans made during World War II—are easy to justify.”

“Why We Should Fight” by Kori Schake (Senior Fellow and Director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute) in *Foreign Affairs*

Schake argues the Powell Doctrine “remains the best way for American presidents to decide why and how to go to war.” Originally articulated by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, the Doctrine was itself derived from historical experience—seeking to avoid a repeat of the deployment of US troops in Lebanon that ended in the October 1983 attack by Hezbollah. Applying the Doctrine to the current war in Iran, Schake contends, “virtually all of the war’s manifold failures flow from its inability to pass the tests.” Trump’s inability to escalate and Iran’s chokehold on Hormuz show US adversaries “the brilliance of the American military is largely irrelevant."

“Not Losing the Iran War” with Hal Brands (Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins SAIS) on *The Remnant with Jonah Goldberg*

With the Iran war at an impasse, Brands argues that Washington lacks a viable exit strategy while facing growing cooperation among China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. He compares today’s alignment to the original Axis: Germany and Japan often aided each other simply by fighting separate wars, whereas today’s adversaries exchange weapons, technology, troops, and economic support directly. Brands also rejects the feasibility of a “reverse Kissinger” in which the US could leverage closer relations with Russia to isolate China, noting that Nixon exploited a Sino-Soviet split after the two had actually fought each other.

China

“Revisionism Reconsidered: Grand Strategy in a Post-Imperial Age” by Francis J. Gavin (Distinguished Professor and Director, Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins SAIS) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

Gavin argues that the post-1945 decline in conquest reflected not only the UN Charter, Cold War blocs, and nuclear deterrence, but demographic, economic, and technological changes that made territory less valuable. Today, he proposes Russia and China may be pursuing narrower irredentist claims rather than the global imperial projects of Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan. The distinction matters because treating every revisionist challenge as another 1930s risks applying strategies designed for a different international system, he suggests.

“Is Trump Really Giving Xi a State Visit 40 Days Before the Midterms?” by Julian Gewirtz (former Senior Director for China and Taiwan Affairs, US National Security Council; Non-Resident Fellow, Harvard’s Belfer Center) in *Paper Tiger*

Gewirtz recalls previous state visits by Chinese leaders to highlight areas to watch during Xi Jinping's visit to the US on September 24. For example, the guest list at state dinners "gives a snapshot of who the White House thinks matters" for US-China relations, he notes. In 1979, President Carter invited Richard Nixon back to the White House for the first time during Deng Xiaoping's visit. Gewirtz predicts business leaders "will be vying for seats" this time. Trump will be looking for informal moments to connect with Xi, as Reagan did in 1984 during a stroll with Premier Zhao Ziyang, and seeking to avoid humiliating "slip-ups"—in 2006, a pro-Taiwan protestor interrupted remarks by President Bush and Hu Jintao.

"Can China and America Avoid the Thucydides Trap?" by **Brandon M. Patterson** (President & CEO, Athena Strategic Policy) for The La Jolla Center for Pacific Strategy

Reflecting on **Graham Allison's** Susan Shirk Lecture on U.S.-China Relations at the UC San Diego Forum, Patterson describes "the thrust of the Thucydides Trap: not that war between Great Powers is unavoidable, only that the structure of international relations raises its likelihood, demanding a greater level of reflection among leaders." He highlights Allison's "emphasis on human decision-making, which was so central to Thucydides' *History*," too. "In both works, the unifying thread is that misperceptions of the adversary's trajectory are what lead to catastrophic decisions." Patterson outlines the resemblance between the US-China competition and the rivalry between Britain and Germany which preceded WWI. He observes: "The essence of analogy is not a precise correspondence between periods, but the similarity of the problems each generation confronted."

US Politics

"America's Fevered Dreams: The 'Deep State' in Perspective" by **Charles S. Maier** (Professor Emeritus of History, Harvard University) in *Rearview Mirror*

Maier traces the history of "the deep state," which Trump and his advisers, especially Steve Bannon, have often blamed when facing resistance in their policymaking. However, "The belief in a deep state," Maier argues, "exemplifies a long and murky American tradition, embodying what historian Richard Hofstadter notably labeled in 1964 as 'the paranoid style' in American politics." Maier's tour through US history shows that both "Republican as well as Democratic administrations contributed to what social scientists would conceptualize as the administrative state."

"Above the Law" by Daniel Immerwahr (Professor in the Humanities, Northwestern University) in *The New Yorker*

Reviewing *Supremacy* by **Nikolas Bowie** (Professor of Law, Harvard Law School) and **Daphna Renan** (Professor of Law, Harvard Law School), Immerwahr puts the usually undisputed claim that the US Supreme Court has the power to "overrule a coequal branch of government" into historical context. In fact, that claim was "bitterly contested for more than a century" after its establishment in 1803, with growing concerns that the Court's influence was anti-democratic. Bowie and Renan recommend today's politicians should feel empowered to disobey the Court, as Abraham Lincoln did after the Dred Scott ruling. Immerwahr raises doubts, arguing that the Court is helpfully restraining executive power today.

"Historian's American Road Trip Examines Parallels Between the Gilded Age and Today" with Beverly Gage (Professor of History, Yale University) interviewed by Judy Woodruff (senior correspondent) on *PBS NewsHour*

"It's often said that we live in a second Gilded Age," Gage says of an analogy that surfaced while writing *This Land is Your Land* . "One of the big questions of the Gilded Age and the progressive era was, could you run a democracy, could this country survive as a republic when you were going to have these concentrations of wealth and power?" Gage's research finds that "significant labor power" helped balance scales in the 20th century, but "has been falling away ever since," leaving Americans today with a sense of "erased" progress. On *Rendezvous with History*, Gage describes her book as a reminder of how "Americans over time have made use of their history, their communities, to be places to re-envision the country, to grapple with the fiercest questions of their moment, and to provide different models for how you do that and how you think about it."

"The Midterms Feel Like 2006 All Over Again" by Carl Hulse (chief Washington correspondent) in *The New York Times*

Hulse argues that parallels between this year's midterm elections and the 2006 midterms are "instructive" for both parties, agreeing with Senator Chuck Schumer who has said "the analogy is amazing" and former White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel who called 2026 "2006 2.0." Hulse stresses the "structural changes" that complicate the analogy, such as recent redistricting that has made it harder to unseat some Republicans who might have otherwise faced tough races. But Hulse also notes strategic lessons that Democrats might draw from their victory in 2006, including the necessity to focus on "kitchen-table economic concerns" (Social Security privatization in 2006, cuts to social programs in 2026).

"250 Years of the American Berserk" by Phil Tinline (historian and documentarian) in *Engelsberg Ideas*

"We should be wary of the comforting notion that had it not been for Trump, all would be well with the American experiment," Tinline warns. "From its bloody birth in revolutionary war, the United States has been a stunningly violent place, even as it has continued to offer millions a better life, based on the Declaration's principles." Tinline argues that the Declaration's original contradiction—representing colonists' simultaneous fear of being "enslaved" to British tyranny and facing rebellion from their own slaves—continues to haunt the US. Both "nightmares… express the same basic dread. That is, the forced loss of status and power, in a country that was trying to invent itself, in the midst of crisis, by sheer force of will. This fear appears to have been encoded into America's national identity, laying the ground for repeated eruptions of the American berserk."

Europe

“[Influence After Empire: Is Britain Still a Great Power?]” with **Brendan Simms** (Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for Geopolitics, University of Cambridge) on *BBC’s Radical*

To host **Sophia Smith Galer’s** question about the UK’s great power status despite the US and China’s large lead in AI, Simms says, “The parallel example, or, if you like, the precedent, [is] the nuclear revolution.” After some years of US nuclear monopoly, “in the end, states acquired those capabilities.” Simms acknowledges that “if AI delivers on all the potentialities that it’s set to have,” the UK’s “days as a great power, if it fails to keep up, would be numbered.” But “if, on the other hand, the historical pattern… reasserts itself and these things are then redistributed or acquired in the way that they have been in the past,” Simms argues, then the innovation gap is “going to be a lot less important.” *The Return of the Great Powers* was also recently reviewed by **G. John Ikenberry** (Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University) in *Foreign Affairs* and **Ved Shinde** (History of International Relations PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge) in *India’s World*.

“[Growth is a Life-and-Death Matter for Europe]” by **Janan Ganesh** (columnist) in *The Financial Times*

Ganesh argues that, for Europe, “It must become axiomatic that all priorities are subordinate to growth, because all priorities are subordinate to security.” What might prompt Europe to seek reforms to grow? Ganesh notes historical shocks usually prompt state action, especially when they shake the economy: Britain’s 1976 IMF loan, 1970s US stagflation, market pressure on Mitterrand, the Eurozone crisis. He questions whether an emerging geopolitical challenge alone could push democratic Europe to make the leaps that Imperial Japan did in the Meiji Restoration.

“[Why Every French Politician Is Now a Gaullist]” by **Sylvie Kauffmann** (editorial director, *Le Monde*) in *The Financial Times*

Kauffmann highlights the appropriation of the legacy of Charles de Gaulle by French politicians across the political spectrum: “From radical left to far right, suddenly every French politician is a Gaullist.” For example, Kauffmann argues far-right leader Marine Le Pen casts herself as de Gaulle’s heir even though the founders of Le Pen’s party despised de Gaulle. De Gaulle’s version of French nationalism, Kauffmann maintains, would conflict with Le Pen’s: “His idea of a sovereign France…was of a country open to the world, not a xenophobic, inward-looking nation.” The article is a reminder that history is often applied not for analysis but for ammunition in contemporary political debates.

Applied History Methods

“The Battle for Western Civilization” with **Allen Guelzo** (Professor of Humanities, University of Florida’s Hamilton School) hosted by **Albert Mohler** (President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) on *Thinking in Public*

Describing *The Golden Thread*, Guelzo says his volume *The Modern and Contemporary West* and **James Hankins’** (Professor of Humanities, University of Florida’s Hamilton School) volume *The Ancient World and Christendom* form a two-part series that “take[s] us back to a moment of light” in the Western tradition. “We deal with history because many people resent history today, and this is particularly true in times of despotism, times of authoritarianism, times of tyranny,” Guelzo explains. “Tyrants love to destroy” history, leaving people with nothing “to appeal to from whatever atrocities are being committed… Nothing to compare what the present looks like to something in the past.”

Network Updates

Sarotte Delivers 2026 S.T. Lee Distinguished Lecture at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

Mary Sarotte (Professor of Global Affairs and Management and Director of Program in Grand Strategy, Yale University; Fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center) delivered an S.T. Lee Distinguished Lecture titled "From Post-Cold War Peace to Magical Realism: America, NATO, and Ukraine, 1989 to Today." She highlighted the drivers of deteriorating relations between Russia and the West. While "it seemed as if transatlantic great-power competition had become a thing of the past" after the Berlin Wall fell, "tensions over NATO enlargement in the 1990s and 2000s, combined with economic disaster in Russia and the rise of President Vladimir Putin, eroded relations between the West and Russia once again," the synopsis notes.

International Security Celebrates 50 Years

Introducing a special volume to commemorate the 50th anniversary of *International Security*, **Stephen M. Walt** highlights landmark articles from the past five decades across recurring themes such as the role of force, international relations theory, new global problems, and, indeed, "deep dives into history." Walt explains, "In addition to works of theory, *International Security* has been a welcome outlet for historical investigations into important security issues." Throughout the journal's volumes, "Historians have been central to debates over the nature of the Cold War and its demise," for example, "including John Lewis Gaddis's masterful 'The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System' in 1986."

University of Texas at Austin Expands National Security Faculty, Degree Programs

UT Austin reports that it "is making one of its largest investments in national security education in recent years, substantially expanding its faculty, launching new academic programs, and creating more opportunities for students" in public service and international affairs. The Clements Center for National Security—a major node in the Applied History Network—the School of Civic Leadership, and the History Department are driving this effort. For example, the Clements Center and School of

Civic Leadership have partnered to offer a BA in Strategy and Statecraft. Among 20 new faculty members, several are Applied Historians, including **Cole Bunzel** (Assistant Professor), **Jeremy Friedman** (Professor of Strategy and Statecraft), **Charlie Laderman** (Professor of Strategy and Statecraft), and **Joseph Ledford** (Assistant Professor of Security Studies and Director of Research at the Clements Center for National Security; Griffin Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution).

Applied History Quote of the Month

"A deep understanding of history is necessary—not merely recent history which concerns itself with the trivia surrounding conspicuous men and events, but an understanding of that history which records the main currents of the past activities of men and which leads to an understanding of what has created and what has destroyed great civilizations."

– George Marshall, speech at Princeton University, 1947

BELFER CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Harvard Kennedy School
79 John F. Kennedy Street, Cambridge, MA

belfercenter.org | belfer_center@hks.harvard.edu

02138 USA