

The Thomas Willis Lambeth Distinguished Lecture

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*Are the US  
and China  
Destined for  
War?*

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As someone who is proud of his North Carolina roots, it's a special pleasure to come back to my home state, and particularly to UNC to give the Lambeth Lecture. Tom Lambeth is a man whom I admired when I was a college student, when he was a young assistant to Governor Terry Sanford, and for his work in the years since. It is thus a special honor for me to be here as the Lambeth Lecturer.

I will take about 40 minutes to present an argument, and I look forward to discussion and debate – in particular, to disagreements. I will try to be clear about what I think. But I recognize that I could be wrong about a number of things, and I'm sure we'll all learn more from debate than a choir of agreement.

In this lecture, I will first introduce you to a Great Thinker, whom you all – and especially you students – have an opportunity to include in your mental library, if he's not already there. Second, I will present a Big Idea. Once you get your head around it, this lens will help you see through the news and the noise of the day to the underlying driver of what's currently happening in the relationship between China and the US. Third, I will explore how this lens can help us better understand the most dangerous, urgent crisis on the horizon today: namely, North Korea's quest for a capability to strike the American homeland with nuclear weapons.

First, the Great Thinker is Thucydides. My book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* was published on May 30th. Since then, I've had the opportunity to present the argument all over the world. In talking with audiences across the US, including on a number of radio talk shows, I've learned at least two things: first, this Thinker's name is multisyllabic, and Americans prefer fewer syllables. Second, it's a mouthful. But you will go home today having met a Great Thinker, and you'll be able to pronounce his name. So, on three: one, two, three: THUCYDIDES. Let's do it again. One, two, three: Thucydides.

Who is Thucydides? He was the founder and father of history. He wrote the first history book – ‘history’ defined as an attempt to get the facts right about what really happened and why, without recourse to mythology, spirits, or other interventions. He wrote a famous book that the Chancellor referred to, titled *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. You can download it this afternoon for free. Read the first 100 pages – Book 1. If it doesn’t knock your socks off, check your pulse.

Second, Thucydides had many ideas. Every chapter in my book opens with a quote from Thucydides. But consider the most frequently quoted line in Western international relations studies. Analyzing the war between Athens and Sparta, Thucydides famously wrote: “It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable.”

So the Big Idea is Thucydides’s Trap. This is a term I coined to vivify Thucydides’s insight. When a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power, poop happens.

My book reviews the past 500 years and identifies 16 cases in which a rising power threatened to displace a major ruling power. A brief account of each of these situations is included in the book’s appendix. For those with deeper interest, the Thucydides’s Trap website offers more details on each historical study alongside references to the relevant authoritative sources.

The cases start in the 15th century when Spain emerged to rival Portugal – which was the dominant naval power at the time. And the review concludes with the stretch case of Germany in the period since 1991 – the end of the Cold War – becoming the dominant power in Europe. In 12 of the cases, when you have this Thucydidean dynamic, you have war. And in four of the cases, you do not have war.

So Thucydides’s line about inevitability is really an exaggeration. He means that as hyperbole. Think of it not as 100%, but as likely. So what is Thucydides’s Trap? The dangerous dynamic that occurs when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power.

Third, the question I will come to in the end. Could North Korea's young leader Kim Jong-un drag China and the US into war? Now? This year? Next year? And how is this intensifying crisis that you can follow on your phone or television every day impacted by underlying Thucydidean competition?

For those of you who live in the world of movies rather than the world of policy discussions, the blockbuster of this year is *Wonder Woman*. *Wonder Woman* in this movie is the great force for peace. In one of the scenes, she dances with a man named 'Ludendorff' – he is modeled on a historical figure who was indeed one of the German generals at the end of WWI. *Wonder Woman* explains to him that she's here to make peace. He tries to put her down with a dismissive quotation: "Peace is only an armistice in an endless war." She responds: "Thucydides!" And he is nonplussed. She has demonstrated to him that she is a force to contend with. So when you hear a great quote that comes from the ancient past, odds are it comes from Thucydides.

This concept – Thucydides's Trap – has quickly entered the policy debate. Xi Jinping talks about it often. He argues that the essence of the matter is to figure out how to escape Thucydides's Trap. When I was in China this summer, I talked with people in government, universities, and the think tank community about it. In fact, if you check the Thucydides's Trap website, you will see some of that discussion. President Obama has also talked about this, and has discussed it with Xi Jinping. Like Xi, he recommends focusing on how to escape Thucydides's Trap. Also discussing it are a number of Trump administration members – including a distinguished UNC Ph.D., National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster.

So, introduction: Great Thinker – Thucydides. Big Idea – Thucydides's Trap. Urgent policy challenge today – North Korea.

My lecture will address three key questions. For each, I will first give you a tweet-sized answer – in the tradition of Washington today. And then, I will give you a little more.

The first question is: What has been the most significant geopolitical event in the past generation – the past 25 years? The second question is: What will be the most consequential geostrategic challenge for the next 25 years? And thirdly – the subtitle of this book: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?

First, tweet-sized: The biggest geopolitical event of the past 25 years has been the rise of China. Never before has a country risen so far, so fast, on so many different dimensions. For those of you who have not been watching, the first chapter of my book should give you a jolt. I cite former Czech President Václav Havel’s line in which he notes things have happened so fast, we haven’t yet had time to be astonished. So I would say, look at the facts, and be astonished. That’s the big geopolitical event of the last 25 years.

Looking forward to the next 25 years, what will be the biggest geostrategic challenge? My tweet is: The impact of the rise of China on the US, on Americans’ sense of our role in the world, and on the international order that the US constructed after WWII and has underwritten for seven decades since. If I had a few more characters, I would say seven decades that have been without great power war, which is historically anomalous.

Third question: Can the US and China escape Thucydides’s Trap? Here I retreat to my professorial perch. The answer is “No,” and “Yes.” “No” – if we insist on business as usual in relations between the US and China, then we should expect history as usual. In my view, that’s what we’ve seen for the past 25 years, from Republicans and Democrats alike. So business as usual will likely produce history as usual, which would mean catastrophic war between the US and China.

“Yes” – we can escape Thucydides’s Trap if we remember George Santayana’s insight: only those who fail to study history are condemned to repeat it. There is no obligation for Trump and Xi, or their successors, to make the same mistakes leaders made in 1914, which steered them into World War I. Indeed, we can avoid the

mistakes that Pericles and the King of Sparta made 2,500 years ago in the lead-up to the Peloponnesian War.

So that's the tweet-sized versions of the three big questions that will capture the core of the lecture.

Let me then offer a few more words on the first question: What happened in the last 25 years? Most of you know that Harvard graduates tend to be self-referential. They think that what happens in the world is mostly what happens in their own environment. In Cambridge, the Anderson Bridge runs across the Charles River between the Kennedy School and the Business School. Discussion of the bridge's renovation began when I was Dean of the Kennedy School, and I quit that post in 1989. The project began in earnest in 2012 and was said to require two years. In 2014 it was explained that it wasn't finished; it would take another year. In 2015, it was explained it would take another year. Now, they've given up telling us when it's going to be fully completed, though it appears to be finally coming to an end. And it's three times over-budget.

There's a bridge in Beijing that I drove across this summer. It's called the Sanyuan Bridge. It's three times larger than the Anderson Bridge. In 2015, China decided they needed to renovate this bridge. How long did it take to complete the project? Two years? One year? Six months?

The answer is 43 hours. You can watch it for yourself on YouTube.

If the folks who did this project would come and finish the Anderson Bridge, I would gladly make a small contribution. I'm sure in North Carolina, all projects like this are completed quickly, and without delay. But maybe not.

In the chapter in the book on the rise of China, I have scores of examples like this. Consider high-speed rail. In the last ten years, the US has had one high-speed rail project, between San Francisco and Los Angeles. It was supposed to be finished in 2017. Just last year they moved the goalposts to 2029. Many people don't think it will ever be finished.

In those same ten years, how many miles of high-speed rail has China completed? 16,000. In the next ten years, before the 500 miles are done in the US, how many more? More than 16,000.

In my course at Harvard, I give students a quiz. It has 46 indicators comparing the US and China, and the question is, "When could China become #1?" Auto-maker, manufacturing, trading nation, most billionaires, solar power, fastest supercomputer, artificial intelligence, largest national economy. And I make them fill it in with their best guess. Some say 2030 for certain items, 2040 for others, and "Not in my lifetime" for the remainder. Then I give them a second slide, which says, "Already."

All those things already happened. China has the most billionaires. China has the fastest supercomputers. China has the leading artificial intelligence research. Most of you probably missed it, but China has the largest economy in the world today. That was the big takeaway from the IMF-World Bank meeting in Washington in 2014. By the yardstick that the IMF and CIA both agree is the single best measure for comparing national economies, China today has a larger economy than the US.

So, question one: biggest event over the last 25 years? The answer: the rise of China. Second question: looking forward, biggest geostrategic challenge? Answer: the impact of the rise of China.

I was invited three years ago to testify to the Senate Armed Services Committee on this topic by the ranking Democrat on the committee – Jack Reed from Rhode Island, a former student of mine. He said, "Graham, you have to make this testimony simple."



So I gave him ten pages that I thought were lucid and simple. And he said, “Excuse me, I said, ‘simple and short.’” So I shrank it to three pages. He said, “No, no. Simple.” So I said, “Ok, I’ll make a cartoon.”

I reproduce the cartoon in the book. Imagine a children’s schoolyard with seesaws. Now imagine the US sitting on one end of the seesaw, and China sitting on the other end. And the size of the US and China are their relative GDPs. In 2004 China was about 20% the size of the US. In 2014, China was equal, and then slightly larger. In 2024, China will have a 40% larger GDP based on the current trend lines.

What was the Obama administration’s big concept for the past eight years on China and Asia? What was the headline? The “pivot.” Or sometimes called, “rebalance.” And what was the pivot? Advocates argued that we have been putting too much weight on our left foot, fighting wars in the Middle East. Instead, we should put less weight on that foot, and put more weight on our right foot, in Asia, where the future lies. But most didn’t quite notice that as we were having this debate, the seesaw had been shifting to the point that both of our feet are off the ground.

The impact of the rise of China in every domain is only little-by-little creeping into our consciousness. This is true for most Americans, especially red-blooded Americans. And it’s even truer for red-necked Americans – which I acknowledge myself to be, since I come from North Carolina. As a North Carolinian who grew up here in the 1950s and ‘60s, I cannot believe that there could be some other country that could be as big and strong as the US. I know somewhere it is written – in an authoritative document – that “the US” means “#1.” That’s who we are. So, I am struggling to come to grips with this reality. But I can’t deny the facts, either.

In every arena of life, if you’re not seeing China in your space and in your face, I would say either you haven’t been watching, or you should be prepared. China will be the biggest market for everything. Take Starbucks. Starbucks is now opening a new store in China every 15 hours. It will soon have more stores in China than in the US.

But wait a minute – Chinese drink tea, they don't drink coffee. So what is Starbucks doing there? The answer is there are 1.4 billion Chinese. There are only 330 million Americans.

Even if Chinese were only one-fourth as productive as Americans, their economy would be as big as ours. And why should they be only one-fourth as productive as we are? This is a long, hard, complicated problem. In every arena coming to grips with the impact of the rise of China is a challenge. In business, in universities, in defense, in foreign policy, in consciousness.

What does China want? What does Xi's China want? Basically, long before Donald Trump rolled out his banner, "Make America Great Again," Xi Jinping became China's leader in 2012 and announced his program. In colloquial terms, it was to make China great again. As he put it, "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people." In the book, I describe his program for doing that.

Are Xi and his colleagues serious about displacing the US as the predominant power in Asia in the foreseeable future? If you ask any American expert, and especially policy pundits, they will say, "It's complicated. On the one hand... On the other hand..." Read Henry Kissinger's 700 pages, *On China*. It's a great book. Can you find the answer? No.

So I asked the world's premier China-watcher: Lee Kuan Yew. Lee Kuan Yew was the founder and builder of Singapore. He took a little poor fishing village and turned it in a single generation into one of the world's great megalopolises. Singapore today has a per capita GDP higher than the US's. It's a remarkable story.

He lived right next door to China. When Chinese leaders decided to move to a market economy, they came first to Lee Kuan Yew. Deng Xiaoping – the person who started China out on this path – called Lee Kuan Yew his mentor. And he thought of Singapore as a laboratory.

Xi Jinping also called Lee Kuan Yew his mentor. That's a term of highest respect. So I asked Lee Kuan Yew, "Are they serious about displacing the US as #1?" Without a moment of hesitation, he responded, "Of course. Why not? How could they not aspire to be number one in Asia and, in time, the world?"

So we go back to the question: the impact of the rise of China on the US and the international order. Asia has seen seven decades of stability and security that's provided the environment for the Asian miracles – Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and China. No one has benefitted more than China. Never have these countries experienced such a great burst of economic prosperity as they have seen over these seven decades – thanks to the order the US constructed and maintained. But that order includes what? The US Navy. Who is the arbiter of events in the South China Sea? The US Navy. And the East China Sea? The US Navy. Who owns the air over this space? The US Air Force. Who has a view about everything that goes on there? The US. Who has bases across the region? The US.

From a Chinese perspective, it looks like we are crowding them. Actually, we are crowding them. As I write in the book, looking out on the waters adjacent to China from Beijing, "China sees China's seas." A Chinese PLA Navy official asked me: "Why do your maps call the body of water adjacent to our homeland the South China Sea? It's not called the 'American Sea.' It's not called, 'International Sea.' It's called, 'China Sea.' Why is this body of water, on your map, called the 'East China Sea?' It's because it's the water just on our border. It's just like you think of the Caribbean."

Americans today like to think of ourselves as more sophisticated. But when the US emerged in the beginning of the 20th century to become the dominant power in what we called "Our Hemisphere," how did we behave? I have a delicious chapter that most Americans will find very uncomfortable. Chapter Five asks, "What if Xi's China was just like us?" Specifically, what if China was just like us when we were emerging at a similar point on our trajectory? I read this through the eyes of Teddy Roosevelt, one of my heroes. Teddy Roosevelt was 37 years old when he went to

Washington to become the Number Two person in the Department of the Navy. This was 1897. In the decade that followed, what happened?

Teddy had come to Washington with the view that he had been expressing for the past 15 years – that having foreigners in our hemisphere was an abomination. This especially applied to the Spanish, who were occupying Cuba. In this decade after he arrived in 1897, first there was an explosion of undetermined origin on a ship in Havana Harbor. The US used this as a justification for declaring war on Spain. We quickly defeated Spain, liberated Cuba, and took Puerto Rico. We got Guam as a spoil of war. Secondly, we supported – and even sponsored – a coup in Colombia. The US created a new country – Panama – which the next day gave us a contract for a canal Teddy wanted so his ships could sail from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Next, we threatened war – first with Germany, and then with Britain – over territorial disputes in Venezuela. Roosevelt gave them the choice of either butting out or fighting. So they decided to leave.

Finally, we stole from Canada the largest part of the fat tail of Alaska. That's the story I enjoy the most, because I go fishing in Tongass National Forest, which is part of this area that we stole. Basically, if you look at the map, there's Alaska, and then there's this tail that runs down toward the US that cuts Canada off from the sea – it's about 600 miles long, where Juneau is located. The full story is in the book. There's a river there called the Stikine River. John Muir, a founder of modern environmentalism, told Teddy Roosevelt, "The Stikine River is like one hundred Yosemites." So Teddy Roosevelt said, "That sounds like America to me." So we threatened war with Canada to take this territory, which we did. We didn't pay for it at all. And it's a great national forest. This piece of territory is larger than West Virginia.

Finally, Teddy announced the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Remember the Monroe Doctrine? That's from the previous century – it warned Europeans to stay out of the Western Hemisphere. The Roosevelt Corollary says if any nation in our hemisphere behaves in a way that we don't like, we'll send the

Marines and change their government. And then every year that followed, for the next decade, we did just that, in one country or another.

So imagine a China that felt similarly confident came to think, “This is our time. We’re restoring the great Chinese people. We’re restoring the great China.” If China were to behave as Teddy did, war with the US would almost certainly be the outcome.

Xi Jinping has behaved in a much more reserved fashion so far. I hope that he will continue to do so, and I wish the same for his successors. But when rising powers rise, they think, “I’m bigger, I’m stronger. I deserve more say. I deserve more sway. The current arrangements don’t take account of my interests, because I wasn’t even here when they set up the arrangements. So things should be adjusted, to take account of me.” That’s normal.

And the ruling power thinks, “Wait a minute, you upstart. The status quo is not just the status quo. It’s good. Indeed, it is order. We helped build this order. Without this order, you wouldn’t have grown up. You should be grateful. You should even help share part of the burden for this order. You should be a responsible stakeholder in the order that we designed and we oversee.”

We can see this dynamic in Athens and Sparta. This dynamic is repeated in each of the 16 cases. We can see this dynamic in Chinese-American relations today.

Third question: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap? In the book, I try to draw lessons both from the success and from the failures. Every case is nuanced. Every case is fascinating. Every case offers significant clues. I would say so far, we’re not doing well. So far, if you were characterizing the way we were behaving, it seems a lot like business as usual. And if we settle for business as usual, we should not be surprised if we get history as usual.

But there are many lessons for us to learn about avoiding conflicts. The conflict that I would say is most similar to the current challenge, and that went bad, is the challenge that Germany posed to Britain in the decades before 1914. This produced World War I. And the most encouraging situation similar to the current case is the surge of the Soviet Union in the 1950s and '60s and '70s. The US met this rising power with a remarkable strategy for the Cold War, which ultimately ended without the ultimate nuclear bang we rightly feared. Let me say a word about each of those.

I have a chapter on 1914 in my book. I think you cannot study 1914 too much. I've actually been interested in this subject for fifty years. And I still cannot explain how the assassination of an archduke produced a conflagration so devastating that historians had to invent a whole new category: World War. That's why it's called World War I. After unification in 1870-71, Germany's GDP was about half the size of Britain's. By 1900 it was about equal, and by 1914 it was a quarter larger. At that point the Kaiser was building a navy that could challenge Britain's. Britain had grown accustomed to ruling the world. For a hundred years, it managed an empire on which the sun never set. Britain ruled the waves.

So what happens? The archduke was assassinated by a Serbian terrorist. Few people even noticed – except in Vienna. Churchill, who was the First Lord of the Admiralty in Britain, hardly even commented on the event. It was not interesting to him, because it seemed inconsequential and in a far-away place.

But in Vienna, the Austro-Hungarian emperor thought, "If we don't punish the Serbs for this, what are we going to punish them for?" So he decided to punish them. The Kaiser and the German government had only one ally: the Austro-Hungarian Empire, even though it was a weak reed. But they felt obliged to back their ally, in what they thought was a reasonable move to punish the Serbs. The Russians were sympathetic to the Serbs, since both were Greek Orthodox. So they backed the Serbs. The French had a military alliance with the Russians. The British, who had for 400 years assiduously avoided getting entangled on the continent, had become entwined

with the French. So events spiraled out of control, and ended in a war that engulfed all the parties.

At the conclusion of this war, every one of the leaders had lost what he cared about most. For the Austro-Hungarian Emperor, his whole empire dissolved and he was gone. The czar in Russia had been overthrown by the Bolsheviks – so his regime was gone. The Kaiser in Germany had been tossed out. France had been bled of its youth for a whole generation. It never recovered as a great power. And Britain, which had been a creditor for a century, became a debtor, and was on a slow, declining path. If you had given the players a chance for a do-over, nobody would have chosen what he chose. Nobody wanted the war they got. Each leader lost what he cared about most. But it happened.

Thucydides reminds us of the extreme vulnerability created when a rising power threatens a ruling power. Third-party actions can trigger a cascade of actions and reactions that drag both principal competitors to places neither wants to go.

To take a more hopeful case, consider the Cold War. I have a good chapter on it in the book. Students in particular should study the Cold War carefully. In a nutshell: at the end of World War II, the US and the Soviet Union were left standing. The Soviet Union's economy began to surge in the 1950s. It exploded a nuclear weapon and kept its troops in Eastern Europe. The famous Long Telegram from George Kennan on February 22nd, 1946, warned that the Soviet Union would be an even greater existential threat to the US than the Nazis were.

This big idea took some time to sink into the thinking in Washington. But ultimately, it spurred a surge of creativity and imagination that invented the Cold War strategy. That Cold War strategy had an economic pillar – the Marshall Plan, a breathtaking idea to rebuild Europe. It included NATO, a military alliance that committed the US to fight for Europe. And it involved an ideological campaign to undermine communism and expose its contradictions. You then had 40 years of this struggle, but

without bombs and bullets. Even though it's called "Cold War," in my list it counts as no war – since war is defined as thousands of combatants killing each other.

Is it imaginable that the US could have a long strategy now, as it did then? That it could accept, for a long period of time, things as totally unacceptable as the fate of captive Eastern European nations forced to live under Soviet domination? We did. That it would stay out of real fights with the Soviet Union, as it did when the Hungarians had an uprising and the Soviets crushed them? Or when the Czechs rose up, and the Soviets defeated them? In both cases, we failed to come to their aid, and left them to fight for themselves. That we would work to undermine a system that doesn't make any sense? We did. And then ultimately, things turned out better than we would have expected. I would say this offers an instructive set of lessons.

So on to the third question: Can America and China escape Thucydides's Trap? Not if we just keep doing what we're doing. But we can if we are imaginative and apply the lessons that we have learned from the previous cases.

To conclude, let me come back to Korea briefly. If you've been watching your news feed, you'll notice that what we're seeing is like a Cuban Missile Crisis in slow motion. Historians agree that the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was the most dangerous episode in recorded history. We caught the Soviet Union putting nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba. President John Kennedy determined that he would never let this happen. Kennedy was prepared to run what he thought was a one-in-three chance of nuclear war in order to prevent Soviet nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba. At the end of thirteen intense days, he faced two options. Option 1: Attack the missiles in Cuba, to prevent them from becoming operational. Or, Option 2: refuse to attack and, in effect, accept a *fait accompli* – a Soviet nuclear missile base in Cuba.

Only when he got to this fateful fork in the road did he finally become imaginative, and think beyond the box. He knew the given options were unacceptable. The first required attacking the missiles there, which he thought would lead the



Soviets to respond in ways that would end in nuclear war. But if he failed to act, Khrushchev would conclude that he can take advantage of the US, move against Berlin, and thus lead to nuclear war.

Rejecting both, Kennedy became inventive, and identified a third option, which ultimately led to mission success. For more, see my book *Essence of Decision*.

Turning to the current case, we can imagine what the world will look like in November 2018. At that point, we will know what happened in the current faceoff between Kim and Trump. There are three possibilities: (1) North Korea will have completed the next series of ICBM tests and have a credible threat to strike American cities with nuclear warheads; (2) Trump will have ordered airstrikes on North Korea to prevent that happening; or (3) a minor miracle will have avoided the first two possibilities.

In the first case, how bad is an outcome in which Kim Jong-un obtains the ability to hit San Francisco or Los Angeles with nuclear weapons? Already known in intelligence circles as “Missiles-R-Us,” North Korea would threaten to become “Nukes-R-Us” and could sell nuclear weapons to terrorists or other rogue states. President Trump has vowed that this scenario is never going to happen.

In the second possibility – if the US attacks the ICBM launch sites – we are likely to see a second Korean War. When asked about this scenario by Congress, Secretary of Defense James Mattis has repeatedly insisted that such a war would be “catastrophic.” He has reminded members of Congress that in the first Korean War, tens of thousands of Americans, hundreds of thousands of Chinese, and millions of Koreans died.

If you need a refresher, you can read an account of that conflict in *Destined for War*. When the US approached the Chinese border, about to reunify the Korean Peninsula under Seoul, China entered the conflict and beat the US back down the

Peninsula to the 38th parallel. So the first Korean War was a bloody and painful war. And we didn't win – it was a draw. A second Korean War is no more appealing.

The third possibility would see Trump and Xi hammer out a joint plan for stopping Kim from further ICBM and nuclear tests. The Chinese government has offered a formula it calls “freeze for freeze.” North Korea would stop testing for the year ahead and the U.S. would stop or significantly modify joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises that Kim despises. The U.S. has so far rejected that idea outright. But if Trump recognizes that the only alternatives are the two we have discussed, it should be possible to find adjustments the U.S. could make in exercises, bomber flights, and troop levels in South Korea that, while uncomfortable and ugly, do not compromise anything vital. Whether that would be sufficient to persuade Xi to threaten Kim's oil lifeline enough to force him to the negotiating table, and whether Kim would accept a freeze for freeze, is uncertain. And even if such a deal were possible, this would only kick the can down the road for another year.

Nonetheless, given where events stand today, if Trump and Xi can find a way to cooperate to produce this minor miracle, we should all give thanks. Indeed, having found out what they can achieve when the U.S. and China are prepared to be more imaginative and adaptive in cooperating, they might find ways to go further, and begin rolling back Kim's nuclear program. And even this partial success would lay a foundation for managing other arenas where the Thucydidean dynamic of a rising power's threat to displace a ruling power creates serious risks of catastrophic war.

What will end up happening? The answer is, “Stay tuned.”

## *Biography*



Graham Allison is Douglas Dillon Professor of Government at Harvard University, founding dean of its Kennedy School of Government, and former director of its Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He has served as special adviser to the secretary of defense under President Ronald Reagan, and under President Bill Clinton as assistant secretary of defense for policy and plans. He is the only person to have been twice awarded the Defense Department's highest civilian award, the Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service, most recently for "reshaping relations with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan to reduce the former Soviet nuclear arsenal." Professor Allison was a member of the Defense Policy Board under seven secretaries of defense, and currently serves on the advisory boards of both the secretaries of state and defense and of the director of the CIA. Born and raised in Charlotte, he attended Davidson College, received his bachelor's degree and doctorate from Harvard and additional degrees from Oxford University. His lecture is the subject of his recent book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Previous books include discussions of nuclear terrorism, Lee Kuan Yew, and the policy classic *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*.

## *Thomas Willis Lambeth*



The Lambeth Distinguished Lecture honors Thomas Willis Lambeth, who led the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation as its executive director for more than two decades until his retirement in 2000. Born in Clayton, North Carolina, Lambeth graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1957 with a bachelor's degree in history, and served as Administrative Assistant to Governor Terry Sanford and to U.S. Representative Richardson Preyer before being

named to lead the Foundation in 1978. Described by one journalist as “the state’s do-gooder-in-chief,” Lambeth throughout his career has exemplified the qualities of personal integrity, a passionate devotion to education, democracy, and civic engagement, and wholehearted pursuit of the ideals of the public good and of progressive and innovative ways of achieving it.

During his tenure, the Reynolds Foundation awarded grants totaling more than \$260 million to address many of North Carolina’s most pressing public policy issues, particularly social justice and equity, governance and civic engagement, community-building and economic development, education, and protection of the state’s natural environment. Tom Lambeth also has made a strong personal impact on many key public policy issues in North Carolina and nationally, including leadership of the Public School Forum of North Carolina, Leadership North Carolina, the North Carolina Rural Center, and a task force of the national Institute of Medicine on the problems of people who lack medical insurance. He also has been a national leader in improving the management and effectiveness of family philanthropic foundations themselves.

*The Thomas  
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Public Policy*

The Lambeth Distinguished Lecture was established in 2006 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by the generous gift of an anonymous donor. Presented annually, its purpose is to bring the UNC campus distinguished speakers who are practitioners or scholars of public policy, particularly those whose work touches on the fields of education, ethics, democratic institutions, and civic engagement. The Lambeth Lectureship Committee, composed of faculty, students and distinguished individuals engaged in public policy, provide overall leadership in collaboration with the Department of Public Policy.