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Letters to the Editor  
The Washington Post  
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To the Editor:


Sebastian Mallaby's column ("The Fake Science Threat," Feb. 6) makes one extremely important point that we agree with: "[G]enerous math and science funding should be a government priority." But the rest of his column – and even moreso its headline – reflect a dangerously complacent attitude that ignores both history and current trends.


Mallaby argues that countries do not compete economically the way that companies do, and that the only possible result of economic competition among nations is a gain for all. This was hardly the experience of Britain as it was gradually bested through the nineteenth century by the growing economic power of the United States, or of, say, Spain as it was bested by Britain in the sixteenth century. Economic and technological gains in one nation can have positive effects elsewhere, but that hardly means that no matter what happens, everybody wins.

Mallaby is similarly blithe about current affairs. While it is certainly true right now that Chinese scientists may commercialize their inventions in the U.S. and that Chinese students trained in the U.S. tend to stay here, those are not immutable, divinely ordained trends. In fact, they have been in the process of reversing for years – a process that will accelerate if economic liberalization in China is matched by a similar political change.

So the U.S. has a choice: we can rest on our laurels and see our leadership wither, or we can provide the "generous funding" that Mallaby first supports but then downplays in his column. Notably, the President's proposals to increase U.S. investment in the physical sciences are not predicated on the notion that the U.S. is declining or that we have an immediate shortage of scientists and engineers for existing job openings. Rather, the President is arguing for reasonable investments now to keep the U.S. strong in the years ahead. And there's nothing in Mallaby's column that argues against that.

Sincerely,

  
SHERWOOD BOEHLERT  
Chairman  
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Chairman  
Science Subcommittee on Environment, Technology,  
and Standards