

Have We Seen this Movie Before? China, Japan, Industrial Policy, and Trade Conflict

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Robert Dohner

Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council;
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of the Treasury

Robert Dohner, Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, led a lunchtime talk titled “Have We Seen this Movie Before? China, Japan, Industrial Policy, and Trade Conflict” on February 19, 2019. The discussion was moderated by Hugh Patrick, Director of the Center on Japanese Economy and Business. Dr. Dohner compared the current trade conflict between the U.S. and China to the trade tensions between the U.S. and Japan in the 1980s. Today, the U.S. government is concerned about China targeting high-technology industries and unfairly acquiring intellectual property and trade secrets from American firms. In the 1980s, the U.S. dealt with many of the same issues with Japan, including a scandal where 18 Japanese businessmen were indicted when they attempted to steal IP from IBM. Dr. Dohner explained that the trade tensions with Japan in the ‘80s were never fully resolved, and predicted a similar outcome for the trade conflict with China, noting that disputes will inevitably continue beyond the current administration. However, the continuous rapid development of technology will change the character of the disputes and force many of the current issues to recede in importance.

