

“Global trade underpins economic growth and it is the thirst for such growth that drives demands for freedom. Witness recent protests by the residents of Hong Kong.”

WHAT, ME WORRY?

At the height of the Korean War, President Truman was sitting with his senior military team. They had in front of them a large world map. Out of the blue, the President put his finger on Iran and claimed it would be the source of the world's geo-political problems in the future. Was he just being very prescient or did his thinking incorporate a deep understanding of the area's complexity? It's impossible to know of course but his prediction was incredibly accurate.

Many might argue that North Korea poses the greater danger to global security. They would be wrong. Iran is a much more populous country, its people are well educated and they enjoy a much higher standard of living. It has access to the latest weaponry from Russia and its military skills are constantly being honed by participation in ongoing armed conflicts in Syria, Yemen and elsewhere. North Koreans meanwhile are malnourished and poorly educated. Their weaponry has been largely self-generated and is not nearly as sophisticated as they claim (though they have nuclear warheads, whether they can launch them successfully is another matter). Further, Iran has oil, and lots of it; North Korea has none. Ultimately Kim Jong Un will do what China's President Xi tells him to do. Iran answers to no one.

Iran obviously has the capacity to be more dangerous than North Korea. But, is the failure of the Iran Nuclear Accord or its pursuit of weapon-grade plutonium sufficient to cause sleepless nights? One hopes the Iranians enjoy life as much as we do and don't want to provoke a global nuclear catastrophe. My own opinion is they (and by 'they' I mean the Mullahs and the military elite) would prefer to continue to de-stabilize the Middle East, ensure their hegemony over the Arab states and export their oil to world markets so their economy can grow in a material way.

Just as worrisome, if not more so, are the actions of our neighbor to the south. The United States no longer sees itself as a guardian of global security as it did in the post-WWII era. Rather it has gradually and increasingly withdrawn into itself, cutting back on things like foreign aid and international development programs. More importantly, as the world's largest economy for the past 100 years, it used its international trading activity to support developing countries. Trade deals were always favorable to weaker economies in the recognition that economic growth in such areas would promote demand for more sophisticated American-made products and services. But the U.S. has tired of this role and those who have long enjoyed a trading advantage, like China, are pushing back. This is not healthy for the U.S., for China, or indeed for anyone. Besides,

the U.S. now feels threatened by China and that tension is increasingly evident. Compromise is hard enough under any circumstance but when the consequences are subject to withering politically-inspired rhetoric in both countries? Wow, is it ever difficult to craft a win/win.

It's not just the United States either. Look at what Britain is up to with this crazy Brexit process. Walking away from your biggest trading partner, thumping your chest on the path to economic suicide is frankly just bizarre. Alienating their most intimate constituencies in Northern Ireland and Scotland is no way to hold a democracy together. Blatant lies underpinned the arguments in favour of leaving (the other side wasn't wholly truthful either) but those who argue democracy has spoken ignore the fact that the original vote was based not only on false information but without any idea of the terms under which an exit could be negotiated. So now we have this once-proud global leader—responsible for advancing much of the world with education, modern medicine and trade—isolating itself. Their economy, and those of their trading partners, will suffer deeply for a very long time.

So what should Canada do in the context of all this? Engage. Engage with China, with the members of the Middle East community, talk, trade, promote democratic values and economic growth. Global trade underpins economic growth and it is the thirst for such growth that drives demands for freedom. Witness recent protests by the residents of Hong Kong. This is an educated public that's tired of being dictated to and wanting the right to contribute to major public policy matters. A growing economy feeds education and education in turn feeds a desire to be involved. Canada needs to trade with the world, not just for the sake of our trading partners but for our own as well.

Stand up to bullies, certainly—but never stop talking. If we want to be heard, we need to speak up.

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