

Trade Wars Are a Fool's Game

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According to the great military thinker, Maj. Gen. J.F.C. Fuller, 'the object of war is not victory. It is to achieve political goals.'

Too bad President Donald Trump does not read books. He has started economic wars against China, Russia, Iran, Cuba and Venezuela without any clear strategic objective beyond inflating his ego as the world's premier warlord and punishing them for disobedience.

Trump's wars are economic. They deploy the huge economic and financial might of the United States to steamroll other nations that fail to comply with orders from Washington. Washington's motto is 'obey me or else!' Economic wars are not bloodless. Imperial Germany and the Central Powers were starved into surrender in 1918 by a crushing British naval blockade.

Trade sanctions are not making America great, as Trump claims. They are making America detested around the globe as a crude bully. Trump's efforts to undermine the European Union and intimidate Canada add to this ugly, brutal image.

Worse, Trump's tariff war against China has damaged the economy of both nations, the world's leading economic powers, and raised tensions in Asia. The world is facing recession in large part due to Trump's ill-advised wars. All to prove Trump's power and glory.

Trump and his advisors are right about China's often questionable trade practices. I did 15 years of business in China and saw a kaleidoscope of chicanery, double-dealing, and corruption. A favorite Chinese trick was to leave imports baking in the sun on the docks, or long delaying them by 'losing' paperwork.

I saw every kind of craziness in the Wild East Chinese market. But remember that it's a 'new' market in which western-style capitalism is only one generation old. Besides, China learned many of its fishy trade practices from France, that mother of mercantilism.

China indeed steals technical and military information on a mass scale. But so does the US, whose spy agencies suck up information across the world. America's claims to be a victim are pretty rich.

What Trump & Co don't understand is that China was allowed into America's Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere by the clever President Nixon to bring it under US influence - just as Japan and South Korea were in the 1950's. China's trade surplus with the US is its dividend for playing by Washington's rules. If China's trade bonus is stripped away, so will China's half-hearted acceptance of US policies. Military tensions will rise sharply.

In China's view, the US is repeating what Great Britain did in the 19th century by declaring war to force opium grown in British-ruled Burma onto China's increasingly addicted people. Today the trade crop is soya beans and wretched pigs.

Trump's ultimate objective, as China clearly knows, is to whip up a world crisis over trade, then dramatically end it – of course, before next year's elections. Trump has become a master dictator of US financial markets, rising or lowering them by surprise tweets. No president should ever have such power, but Trump has seized it.

There is no telling how much money his minions have made in short or long selling on the stock market thanks to insider information. America's trillion dollar markets have come to depend on how Trump feels when he wakes up in the morning and watches Fox news, the Mother of Misinformation.

It staggers the imagination to believe that Trump and his minions actually believe that they can intimidate China into bending the knee. China withstood mass devastation and at least 14 million deaths in World War II in order to fight off Japanese domination. Does the White House really think Beijing will cave in over soya beans and semi-conductors in a daft war directed by a former beauty contest and casino operator? China's new emperor, Xi Jinping, is highly unlikely to lose face in a trade war with the US. Dictators cannot afford to retreat. Xi can wait it out until more balanced minds again occupy the White House.

Trade wars rarely produce any benefits for either side. They are the equivalent of sending tens of thousands of soldiers to be mowed down by machine guns on the blood-soaked Somme battlefield in WWI. Glory for the stupid generals; death and misery for the common soldiers

This fool's war of big egos will inevitably end in a face-saving compromise between Washington and Beijing. Get on with it.

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