

Trade Friends Abroad as a Means to Reduce Terror Threats

American culture tends to have a belief that we are ‘untouchable’ by foreign threats due to our superior military technology and geographic location. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 proved this sentiment wrong and shocked the conscience of our citizens. The government accordingly responded, out of the same shock, and thus began a series of Homeland Security initiatives to prevent a future attack. The initial volley of homeland protections focused on physical security i.e. preventing a physical attack on American soil. However, as technology has developed at an unprecedented rate since 9/11, our foreign enemies have shifted to cyber-terrorism. Cyber-terrorism has the potential to create far more harm than a ‘traditional’ physical homeland attack and our government has shifted certain priorities to address this immediate, ongoing threat.

The most daunting element of cyber-terrorism is that it is levied by our international trade partners, namely China. “The rising prevalence of cyberattacks was detailed in a 2013 report by the U.S. security firm Mandiant that linked the Chinese military to 140 cyberattacks against U.S. and foreign corporations” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2015, para. 2). A recent cyber-attack in June of 2015, which resulted in the theft of private information of twenty-one million government workers (and their families), was attributed to China (Sasse, 2015, para. 1). Our government has not revealed the counter-measure strategy nor new security measures implemented to guard against such attacks, in the future, as such information is classified. However, are there other efforts that the U.S. implemented, aside from cyber security, which could thwart future cyber- attacks?

Let’s return to our trade partnership with China. It is common cultural knowledge that many of our products are produced in China. According to the U.S. Census (2015), the United

States imported more than 185 million dollars in goods from China, for 2015 (up to and including May); this accounts for 20.3 percent of our overall foreign imports and puts China as our number one import trading partner. These statistics were likely considered when the United States government began courting China to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership. “The Obama administration has been pushing the trade pact as a way to write new rules not just for the 12 nations involved but also as an umbrella to someday cover many other countries — above all, China” (Bradsher, 2015, para. 6). What we are witnessing is two major economic powers seeking to protect their economic interests while moving towards an unavoidable closer relationship as required by the necessary expansion of each respective economy. Such an economic marriage could be the model to address threats from rogue states, namely Iran, as a new approach to curb aggressive terror threats against our interests in the Middle East.

The United States government first listed Iran as a terrorist sponsor in 1984. President George Bush named Iran as part of the ‘Axis of Evil’ in his 2002 State of the Union address. George Bruno, writing for the Council on Foreign Relations (2011), stated, “U.S. officials say Iran provides funding, weapons, training, and sanctuary to numerous terrorist groups--most notably in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon--posing a security concern to the international community” (para. 1). It is logical that our government’s interests are firmly in Iran given the onslaught of instability plaguing the Middle East since the Arab Spring began in Tunisia in 2010...and spread throughout the countries of the Arab League and its surroundings. However, world leaders’ accusations of Iran’s enrichment of uranium- leading to developing a nuclear weapon- has been the foremost concern of our partner countries in the Middle East.

President Obama’s administration recently negotiated a deal with Iran to ‘curb’ its pathway to nuclear weapons. This has been ongoing for months and there has been active effort

to reduce the optics of the Iranian threat as a means to gain political and public support for the deal. “An annual security assessment presented to the U.S. Senate by James Clapper, the director of National Intelligence, has excluded Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah from its list of terror threats to U.S. interests, despite both being consistently included as threats in previous years” (Moore, 2015, para. 1).

President Jimmy Carter initiated a series of sanctions against Iran after the United States Embassy was seized (Tehran) in 1979. These sanctions have been ongoing (with more added throughout the years) and the Obama Administration’s deal with Iran seeks to remove some of them. This has resulted (among many penalties) in more than 100 billion dollars of oil sales revenue that is not accessible to Iran. Analysts predict that Iran is sitting on thirty-seven million barrels of oil which cannot be brought to the international market (Capon, 2015, para. 3). The Obama administration’s negotiations would allow Iran to recover this money and sell oil on the international market. Elizabeth Rosenberg worked on the Iran sanctions at the Department of Treasury and is now with the Center for a New American Security. “Rosenberg says Iran's GDP in 2014 was roughly \$400 billion. She says that while \$100 billion sounds like a lot of money, it pales in comparison to the economic relief Iran can expect if and when companies begin to trade and invest with it. And this would be an incentive for Iran to stick to the agreement” (Northam, 2015, para. 15).

The United States could leverage the mass of our trade with China and (forthcoming) Iran to curb their terrorist activities by directly or passively manipulating ‘free’ market forces. This might be the same trajectory that President Obama seeks for Iran in the recent deal. The United States seeks to lessen the terrorist threats to our nation-partners in the Middle East and letting Iran join the international trade market might be the first step needed to maintain a geo-political

presence as a vehicle to protect our interests. Only time will measure the effectiveness of these proposals.

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