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The Real Free Trade Problem?

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Trump Derangement Syndrome is not a mysterious disease. He triggers people for reasons. Still, there is no excuse for smart folks to fool themselves into misunderstanding his sometimes genius.

Take the subject of [yesterday's Common Sense](#), trade protectionism. Trump is plain speaking on this issue, and it is all-too-obvious that Trump harbors old [autarkist](#) notions of trade: it's as if he resents having to pay foreigners for *anything*.

His apparent resentment of benefiting others—*alien* others—is what's so ultra-right-winged about him, and why leftists instinctively hate him.

And it's why many free trade economists regard him as a complete and utter moron. His basic attitude appears to be that trade that

benefits The Other *must* hurt us, and that's just plain wrong.

But sometimes traders *do* aim to harm us.

This is where Trump's attacks on trade with China make more sense. For when we deal with China, we don't just make Chinese workers and businesspeople stronger, we make the Chinese State stronger—most particularly, the Chinese Communist Party. And that organization has set itself as the enemy not only of the United States but also of all competing states ... and the very idea of individual freedom.

Free trade is great, because voluntary trades make both sides better off, and all sides are positively advantaged even when many participants are out-competed and required to re-tool, re-group, and re-invent.

Yet, free trade with those who seek to destroy you is quite problematic. And this is not often figured into the elaborate reasoning offered by free-market advocates.

Trump instinctively knows this, looking warily at those who would use the strength they gain from their people's trades to transform market power into military power. There exist free traders who think this cannot happen. They are wrong.

The point is to recognize threats and defend ourselves while also embracing the mutual benefits of trade whenever possible.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.