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# Nothing is automatic about history

By Michael A. Weinstein

Here we go again. A wave of euphoria has swept over sections of the American public, blown by the winds of change throughout the world. We hear that Marxism has proven a failure and that socialism is retreating. We learn about something optimistically called "people power" and immediately believe that humanity has finally been born to the revelation of American constitutional democracy. We are fast becoming a nation of enthusiasts rather than a sane society.

We need a continual regimen of cold showers imposed by the soberly realistic segments of public opinion to prepare a temper favorable for us to prevail in a perilously competitive world. The other side of mass unrest is instability, uncertainty and a heightened probability of conflict. Entrenched elites of whatever ideological stripe tend to be conservative simply to maintain the system that gives them their privilege. We should have learned decisively from the Iranian revolution that "people power" can lead to the totalitarian state as fast as it can lead to weak democracies like those in the Philippines or South Korea. We simply don't know what to expect from the present turmoil.

We are fools if we believe that the changes underway in the world will result in a community of cooperative and democratic nations living in peace. Nothing is automatic about history, certainly not an inevitable tendency toward American-style democracy. When will we realize that we are not the model for the world, but, perhaps in general and certainly in many particulars, the greatest nation on earth? As such, we must turn away from wishful thinking about what others might do and consult our own interests, and take our own counsel.

We should examine and pursue our own interests because we can no longer take it for granted that we have much of a say in determining world events. From Panama to Beijing, we find ourselves to be one player at a crowded table, without all the best cards. Our allies are also our competitors, like Japan and the new Europe. Our opponents often behave like allies. We can no longer be certain who is friend and who is foe in each circumstance. We need to be prepared to compete in all spheres—the diplomatic, the military, the economic and the cultural. As other nations find

their own ways, we have to find ours in a process of national rebuilding.

The cornerstone of our interests lies in the economic field. We are entering a dangerous period in economic history, in which powerful trading blocs invigorated by industrial technology will compete in the world market to maintain and enhance the standard of living enjoyed by their populations. The competition promises to be rigorous and sometimes brutal, covering the entire economy, from infrastructure to entertainment. It will be played out against the background of economic weakness, often verging on collapse, outside the great trading zones of North America, Europe and East Asia. The struggle for market share might result, as it did in the 1930s, in a world depression. We may not be able to prevent that outcome and should prepare now to cushion economic shocks with greater economic independence.

The unsung legacy of the Reagan presidency is the free-trade agreement with Canada. Without fanfare and with admirable prudence, we have begun to create the basis for our economic survival. The trade pact will impel healthy adjustments on both sides of the border, increasing overall efficiency and economic autonomy. It is an exemplary case of the triumph of national over sectoral interests, serving as an appropriate standard for creative initiatives throughout the economy in which short-term advantages are set aside for long-term goods.

Within the context of the free-trade zone, we should move toward an industrial policy geared to balancing the two essential needs of competing effectively in the world market and achieving greater economic self-sufficiency. Just as we are foolish if we believe we are witnessing the dawn of world democracy, we are deluded if we think we can plunge into the waters of global trade without a life jacket. Protection for its own sake is a prescription for debility, but incentives to compete better can build economic strength. "Industrial policy" is anathema to free marketeers, but it may be necessary to preserve our standard of living. We cannot count on a cooperative world economic order, even if we must work to encourage one that is consistent with our strength.

The interdependence of world economies, fostered by the communications revolution, does not guarantee harmony, but can as easily lead to fratricide. Technology has not abolished human nature with all its greed, insecurities and caprices. If we begin to rebuild at the root of our strength, our economy, we will have the vigor to support an imaginative diplomacy, a credible armed force and a less discordant, though still gloriously plural, culture.

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which government in the one that massacred Beijing would probably Africa in its dust.

Aren't we fickle. This was in power in 1972, historic visit to Mao's doors to the West after The China that Westerners was clean, well-fed, efficient moral—as enchanting

If Rip Van Winkle had awakened yesterday, he would find the reports from China

**Stephen Cl**

been taken over by a new truth, China has the same Westerners extolled no until now, had been far ruling in 1972.

The gullibility of American Mao's paradise would have had left behind so much State Department officials that instead of the "ruined poverty, natural disaster rulers" he recalled from miraculous transformation

"Wherever I went the power lines," he wrote. "There are no derelict rags and tatters, no sign of malnutrition." And not a child cry." So content month in China, "I had

Historian Barbara Tuchman, Associated Press, detected a sense of purpose dignity." "The lid of the been lifted." China's economic the greatest bootstrap of

Others agreed. "The convinced he has never reported. "There can no China is devising a high system," gushed Harvard Galbraith.

The mystery is why are surprised that in three decades some industrialization, devastated by civil war, a looked better after years

But much of what the wasn't so. In 1972, as today, poor, with a per capita income Taiwan's (today, it's less reasonable standard, its howling failure.

In 1972, as today, for Chinese at that time ate Indian. During the 1950s policies, the country sufficed at least 25 million people—No starvation? No major official tour.

Here the visitors may be More offensive was their government's suffocating lives. Most of the tourists totalitarian features of Mao

Others suggested that if democracy were useless to needs," insisted Tuchman Harvard's John King Fair China scholars, wrote that the human rights can self-styled universal declaration