

Populism Is No Way to Rule.
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It is good advice to hide your wallet when you hear "Power to the People." Our founding fathers knew what "populism" could look like, and deliberately designed our government to keep popular passions at bay. We have representative, not direct democracy government; two bodies in Congress: House of Representatives and Senate; presidential vetoes to override Congress; and Supreme Court decisions to protect us from unjust legislation. It is not a perfect system, but it is better than most other systems around the world, considering the size, diversity, and unequal education of our population.

The latest populism issue is the bipartisan agreement in Congress that the Saudis were definitely behind the 9-11 attack and that families of those killed that day should be able to directly sue them. This is a feel-good measure, and personally, it would make me feel good to stick it to the Saudis.

However, President Obama, who has expressed (privately) his disdain for the Saudis, has vetoed this bill for a very good reason. When we are able to go after another government in court (short of a war-time enemy), what is to stop other citizens around the world to go after us? What about families of jihadis killed by a drone suing us? Some years ago, the Spanish government (after a leftist election) declared Henry Kissinger a war criminal who could be arrested if he traveled to Spain. Would we like that? What about our soldiers fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Special Forces in Africa? Should they be subject to "international law" (an imaginary system of unenforceable law)?

Congress has seen fit to override the veto. This legal (and rare) check on presidential power is certainly part of our system. Popular pressure has done rash or unwise things before (during our pre-Civil War days), passing laws mandating the return of runaway slaves which even the Supreme Court supported. But not long after that shameful incident, the Civil War decided the issue and President Lincoln pushed the Emancipation Act to end slavery.

I can predict that passing this act against the Saudis will blow back on us. We feel good now, but will not later.

The other populist issue now roiling our politics is that of international trade. Both left-wing Democrats and very right-wing Republicans hate foreign trade. They see it as responsible for the loss of American manufacturing jobs, but overlook many more and different jobs that have come from our global trade. NAFTA, the punching bag of Donald Trump, has provided enormous trade benefits to the US, Canada, and Mexico. We don't hear from the beneficiaries of all this trade, which is too bad. The numbers are on their side.

Hillary Clinton has a dilemma. She has been a long supporter (rightly) of global trade treaties. The president has the duty to support this new trade treaty, and were this not the time of political noise, would have no trouble getting bipartisan support. The Republicans have always supported it (until now), and the Democrats have played an important role of pushing for a level playing field in international trade, demanding better treatment of workers. Candidate Clinton cannot support this trade act in the face of all the uproar, but would have to do so as President.

What all the "Power to the People" crowd forget is that we have many products and goods that we sell abroad, providing a large income to this country. Furthermore, in promoting world trade, we help lift many countries out of poverty, which results in their buying more from us. We need to remember that "the people" don't always know best when it comes to complex issues. A president has the duty to all Americans, not just to his or her party. I would like to hear Clinton educate her supporters about the benefits of world trade. That would be a profile in courage. NAFTA was never "the worst deal ever negotiated by the US government," as Donald Trump claims. The entirety of North America has benefitted from it in more ways than it cost us.

676 words

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