

SNG-We're at war-11-19-18

We're at war, and we're losing

By Jim Nowlan

For millennia, war was how you did economic development. Today, economic dominance is how you do war, and we're losing.

I read recently that some school districts across our country are going to four-day weeks, "to save money," and maybe to provide families more flexibility.

The article brought to mind the first of my several six-week teaching gigs at Fudan University in Shanghai, each capped by invited lectures for me to give at universities all across China. This sure doesn't make me an expert on China, yet allow me some observations.

The day after I first arrived in Shanghai, now 15 years ago, I took a stretch-the-legs stroll from my "foreign expert guest quarters," located on a leafy side street.

It was early Saturday morning, and I was surprised to see gaggles of cute, early grade school-age kids in neat uniforms, gathering outside what was obviously a school building.

Later I asked my host professor about this. "Oh, of course, our children all attend school every Saturday morning, until noon."

Indeed, Chinese children not only attend school about 210 days each year (versus our 174 days), but for an hour longer each weekday than in the U.S.

[I am not an expert in pedagogy, so I don't know the optimum amount of time in school for maximum learning. But I do know that you don't learn math, biology, languages, architecture and of "how best to live our lives" and the other Great Questions by osmosis. One learns through

the hard work of teachers and students exchanging solid information, repeating it, discussing it, using the information to address and solve problems. It's sometimes grueling, but necessary work.

[The article I note above reported that school officials said their students learned as much in four days as in five. I don't believe it. But if so, we'll likely try three-day weeks soon.]

The Chinese and other Asians are hungry to learn (exhorted by their parents), and become rich.

How hungry? During my first teaching gig at Fudan, I took an early morning 6:30 a.m. walk around the campus with my "assistant teacher," graduate student Gu Yu. We walked by a group of maybe 20 young people, standing before the doors of a campus building.

"Who are they, and why are they standing there?" I asked. "Oh, they're students. They're waiting for the library to open."

[As I write this, Harvard University is fighting a lawsuit that claims the university discriminates against Asians. "Only" 40 percent of the student body there is Asian or Asian-American (versus 4 percent of our nation's population), and many other Asian-Americans are apparently denied admission even though their test scores are higher than those of Caucasians admitted.]

The Chinese government is pouring huge amounts of money into education. More Chinese are now enrolled in their universities than Americans here. Hundreds of thousands additional Chinese attend university in the U.S., sucking up knowledge from our best schools, which they apply upon their return to China.

And, as China has four times more people than we have in the U.S., it is simple math to note that China has more honor students than we have students.

So what, readers might say? Let their economy dominate the world. We can become another Switzerland, relatively small but still wealthy and comfortable.

The Chinese have, however, grudges to bear, even if subconsciously, and to repay.

Chinese history is measured in thousands of years. School students learn to revere the Ming, Qing and many dynasties, going back to pre-history. During much of that time, the Chinese were, or certainly thought they were, at the center of the world, with all others but barbarians. Indeed “China” means “the Middle Kingdom,” the center of the earth.

That is, until European nations and the U.S. humiliated China to the quick 150 years ago. For half a century, chopping the Middle Kingdom into fiefdoms for commerce, one for each foreign power.

If you can believe it, Western nations, especially the British, literally forced debilitating opium on the Chinese people, enriching the English and others in the West, all against the opposition of its aggrieved, helpless (at the time) leaders.

For the Chinese, a century and a half back is but yesterday.

The Chinese are very proud and plan to even the score. They now seek their revenge by investing heavily in education and science/technology research, maintaining favorable balance of trade schema, and state-supported capitalism.

But how can one nation’s forthcoming economic dominance, if it comes to be, affect us?

Do readers think, to illustrate, that U.S. economic sanctions on Iran aren’t aimed at changing the behavior of leaders and people in that country? Dominant wealth has always been the fundamental tool by which one people subjugates another.

So, while we in the U.S. sleepwalk through our own relative decline, China quietly—maybe not so quietly—rises rapidly toward dominance.

Alas, I'm out of space for my recommendations as to how we might contend with this economic warfare. As announcers used to say on radio decades ago: Stay tuned, same station, same time, next week.