

Newsweek

Here We Go Again: Bashing China for Votes

By William K Watson

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Some things are an inevitable part of every election season. Without a doubt, every candidate running for president in 2016 will, for example, [make unrealistic promises](#) and [pander to special interests](#).

They will also just as surely try to blame America's perceived problems on a foreign menace. For economic issues, China has become the overwhelming favorite as a target for these attacks now that blaming [Japan](#) and [Mexico](#) has gone out of style.

In the 2012 election, the chief China-basher was Mitt Romney, who [transformed himself](#) into a mercantilist and promised to be tough on Chinese currency manipulation. Republicans running for Congress that year had [a similar predisposition](#), and Pete Hoekstra certainly deserves an award for running the most [tasteless](#) anti-China ad. In 2014, it was the [Democrats' turn](#) to blame China on the campaign trail for stealing American jobs.

Now we're getting a taste of how China bashing will play out in the 2016 election. [According to Politico](#), Mike Huckabee has started talking about the Chinesemenace in Iowa. He complained that American wages have been stagnant since Chinese trade agreements went into effect over the past few decades.

"People are working hard, and they have less to show for it," he said. "We need to quit apologizing for being America, and we need to start making it so that Americans can prosper and not just so that the Chinese can buy Louis Vuitton and Gucci bags."

The comments came in response to questions about why the government has kept the embargo in place against Cuba, even as trade barriers with China have been lifted. "We have basically surrendered to the Chinese market," Huckabee said. "We've not put the pressure on them."

Aside from pandering to xenophobia, these kinds of comments are distressing because they demonstrate a willingness to vilify normal economic activity. Huckabee describes trade as "the Chinese" fighting a battle against the U.S. economy in pursuit of frivolous luxury.

I suppose some rhetorical license should be granted to candidates who need to package their policies in a way that appeals to the most people. So maybe instead of "surrendered to the Chinese market," Huckabee meant to say that the United States government has lowered taxes on American consumers and businesses. And maybe instead of "Louis Vuitton and Gucci bags," he meant clothes, food and medicine.

And maybe, just maybe, when he says “we need to start making it so that Americans can prosper,” he means the government should stay out of the way of mutually beneficial commercial activity and stop protecting politically powerful industries from consumer demand for innovative and affordable products and services.

Maybe Mike Huckabee or some of the other candidates will even remember that [a majority of Americans](#) in both major parties think that trade is good for the United States.

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