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Imports Viewed Sceptically at the Washington Post

July 30, 2010 - 2:28 pm

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Dan Ikenson is associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Trade Policy Studies.

What explains the chronically misleading depictions and interpretations of international trade in the *Washington Post*? Is it economic illiteracy? Intellectual indifference? Institutional bias? What?

The opening paragraph in Neil Irwin's [story](#) (online, July 30, 2010, 9:13 am) reads:

The pace of economic growth slowed this spring, according to new government data, as Americans remained reluctant to consume and imports soared.

And a few paragraphs later:

The biggest drain on growth was imports, which rose 28.8 percent, compared with only a 10.3 percent gain in exports.

On July 14, one day after the Commerce Department's monthly trade figures were released, revealing a slight increase in the trade deficit, the opening paragraph in the *Washington Post* story under the heading "Rising Imports Offset Export Gains" read:

America's resurgent appetite for imports may undermine the Obama administration's efforts to rekindle job growth, with a rise in overseas purchases by American businesses and households undercutting the benefits of increased U.S. sales abroad.

I have posted about this problem [again](#) and [again](#) and [again](#) and [again](#) and [again](#) (just this year), but apparently to no avail. The simplistic scoreboard interpretation of trade (where exports are considered "our" team's points and imports "their" team's) combined with a zeal for inciting fears about economic collapse seems to remain the formula of choice at the WaPo.

As I wrote [yesterday](#):

U.S. producers account for over half of the value of U.S. imports, which means there is great potential to increase their competitiveness by improving their access to imports. It also explains the strong correlation between imports and exports, between imports and GDP, and between imports and job growth — facts that too many politicians wish to expunge from the record.

Along with politicians at the end of the last sentence, I should have included a certain newspaper.

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