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Letter to the Editor

TPP not so big a deal

Thomas Friedman is right that President Trump wants to get tougher with China on trade, given that China accounts for half of America's colossal trade deficit in goods of \$760 billion, costing millions of manufacturing jobs ("Connecting Trump's Dots", Feb. 9).

But Friedman is wrong to imply that the Trans-Pacific Partnership, scrapped by Trump, was the right remedy. Most economic assessments suggest that TPP would give the U.S. only meager economic benefits by lowering tariffs and harmonizing trade-related national regulations.

A study by the Peterson Institute estimated that by 2030, American GDP would be only 0.5 percent higher as a result of the TPP. These benefits would have been several times larger if China had been part of the pact.

The TPP was dominantly about geopolitics, not trade benefits. It was a Washington-inspired, protectionist, regional device to contain China's growing economic and political clout in Asia.

How else to explain that China, the world's No. 1 exporter, was left out by Washington? As a result, TPP became the near-equivalent of NAFTA without the United States.

TPP confirmed that Washington's China policy is less about win-win situations and more about seeking zero-sum gains, in this case by trying to create an integrated counterweight in East Asia.

In the Pacific Rim, no meaningful comprehensive trading agreement can be successful without China. But, unlike Barack Obama, Trump loathes multilateralism, so he will pursue bilateral trade deals instead, to leverage America's considerable economic and political muscle in Asia.

Istvan Dobozi, Sarasota, Former lead economist, World Bank