



On Poking Things With Sticks

By Dennis Peacocke

On the subject of poking things with sticks, we may find wisdom in the old adage, “Let sleeping dogs lie.” This usually means, don’t provoke something unless you are fully prepared for both their responses and your own. Provocation of someone or a situation should not be done without strategic thinking—unless, of course, your actions and responses are of little concern because what you are poking is not a danger and won’t require more time and energy than you are willing to invest.

Properly assessing these kinds of realities is something we have all had to discern since childhood. How many times have we said to ourselves, “Gee, I wonder what will happen if I push this button... Or knock that over?” Dare we revisit all the times in our lives where we have provoked a particular person or situation to stimulate a response and got far, far more than we bargained for? Indeed, we may not have to go back that far to recall such an occasion. Sometimes it worked out, sometimes it didn’t. In either case, if we’ve matured, our judgment in such situations should have significantly matured as well.

The risk-reward dimension of human activity lurks everywhere; it’s in all relationships, all business deals, all strategic organization decision-making, and ever present in national foreign policy. Let’s visit foreign policy for a moment. (By the way, if America has any longer-term principles by which it has made consistent foreign policy decisions in my lifetime, I seemingly have missed them. However, that is a foolish digression. Let’s move on.) Rationally, foreign policy should do, or proceed from, at least these kinds of principles:

1. It is guided by the core values through which a nation operates.
2. It categorizes other nations based on a commonality of core values and prioritizes relationships with them upon the common values it can align with. One then can go in the opposite direction and categorize practices within nations that cannot be supported (and even those one may choose to strategically undermine). In all such thinking, the risk-reward evaluation is critical.
3. A number of other things beyond this conversation—not withstanding alliances, treaties, trade issues, military aide or alliances—would then naturally flow out of these kinds of strategic assessment categorizations.

I fully accept that reality is often hard to see; people do foolish things and unexpected changes on significant levels do occur. We still should have some transcendent patterns to our policies on every level. Remember, for example: *Fight no land wars in Asia; don’t support repressive regimes or dictators; reward friends; invest in people and activities you want to see grow; isolate hard-core opponents and neutralize emerging enemies.* Yes, it’s sometimes more complex, but these are basic moves.

So, where are we with China, Iran, Cuba, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela, Russia, Pakistan, and several lesser lights? What lines have we drawn, what bluffs did we not call, and where are our fears both imprisoning us now and setting up more problematic confrontations in the future?

We began with the notion of poking things with sticks. With this in mind, 2015 should be an interesting year. What about others poking us, our friends, or our commitments with sticks? Friendly diplomacy is always best, until it isn’t. And that is...

The Bottom Line

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“*The risk-reward
dimension of
human activity
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the bottom line.

GoStrategic

(formerly Strategic Christian Services)
1221 Farmers Lane, Suite E
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
707.578.7700 | 800.700.0605
email: info@gostrategic.org
web: www.gostrategic.org



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DENNIS PEACOCKE, author of *The Bottom Line* newsletter, is one of the most genuine and compelling communicators of our day. He has carried a concern for social justice for over 35 years. In his college days, this concern was expressed through his involvement in the civil rights and free speech movements. He graduated from Berkeley in political science at the height of the turbulent 60s. Since his conversion in 1968, Dennis has gained international respect as a strategist due to his unique way of applying biblical solutions to the many challenging issues facing families, churches, businesses, and government. A former business owner, Dennis is the founder and president of GoStrategic, a leadership organization dedicated to demonstrating the relevance of Christianity to every area of contemporary life. He is author of four books: *On the Destiny of Nations*, *Doing Business God's Way*, *Winning the Battle for the Minds of Men*, and *The Emperor Has No Clothes*. He has recorded numerous audio and video presentations. Dennis and his wife Jan reside in Santa Rosa, California. They have three adult children and eleven grandchildren.