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Free Trade Agreements: Impact on U.S. Trade and Implications for U.S. Trade Policy

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Summary

Free trade areas (FTAs) are arrangements among two or more countries under which they agree to eliminate tariffs and nontariff barriers on trade in goods among themselves. However, each country maintains its own trade policies, including tariffs, on trade outside the region.

In the last few years, the United States has engaged or has proposed to engage in negotiations to establish bilateral and regional free trade arrangements with a number of trading partners. Such arrangements are not new in U.S. trade policy. The United States has had a free trade arrangement with Israel since 1985 and with Canada since 1989, which was expanded to include Mexico and became the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) effective in January 1994.

The United States has been conducting negotiations with 33 Western Hemispheric countries with a stated goal of forming a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005 and with various Asian and Pacific-Rim countries to achieve free trade and investment by 2020. In the last two years, U.S. interest in bilateral and regional free trade arrangements has surged. In 2000, the United States began and completed negotiations with Jordan on a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) and began negotiations with Singapore and with Chile. Furthermore, some Members of Congress have introduced legislation to encourage the formation of free trade arrangements with other trading partners. The surge in interest in FTAs as a component of U.S. trade policy comes at a time when major U.S. trading partners, for example, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and the EU, are themselves negotiating and forming FTAs with various other countries.

These efforts are of direct interest to Congress. United States participation in free trade agreements can occur only with the concurrence of the Congress. In addition, FTAs will affect the U.S. economy, with the impact varying across sectors. Furthermore, consideration of FTAs is related to the current debate within the Congress over whether to grant the President fast track (trade promotion) authority.

FTAs are now a significant U.S. trade policy tool. Their rapid emergence raises some important policy issues for Congress and the United States as a whole: Do FTAs serve or impede U.S. long-term national interests and trade policy objectives? Which type of FTA arrangement meets U.S. national interests? Are FTAs a substitute for or a complement to U.S. commitments and interests in promoting a multilateral trading system via the WTO? Experts differ sharply over these questions. This report will be updated as events warrant.

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Free Trade Agreements: Impact on U.S. Trade and Implications for U.S. Trade Policy

In the last few years, the United States has considered bilateral and regional free trade areas (FTAs) with a number of trading partners. Such arrangements are not new in U.S. trade policy. The United States has had a free trade arrangement with Israel since 1985 and with Canada since 1989. The latter was expanded to include Mexico in 1994 to become the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) effective in January 1994.

The United States has been conducting negotiations with 33 Western Hemispheric countries with a goal of forming a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005 and with various Asian and Pacific-Rim countries to achieve a free trade and investment area by 2020. In the last two years, U.S. interest in bilateral and regional free trade arrangements has surged. In 2000, the United States began and completed negotiations with Jordan on a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) and began separate negotiations with Singapore and with Chile. Furthermore, some Members of Congress have introduced legislation to encourage the formation of free trade arrangements with other trading partners. The surge in interest in FTAs as a component of U.S. trade policy comes at a time when major U.S. trading partners, for example, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and the EU, are themselves negotiating and forming FTAs with various other countries.

These efforts are important to Congress. United States participation in free trade agreements can occur only with the legislative concurrence of the Congress. In addition, FTAs will affect the U.S. economy, with the impact varying across sectors. Furthermore, consideration of FTAs is related to the current debate within the Congress over whether to grant the President fast track (trade promotion) authority.

The emergence of FTAs raises some important policy issues for Congress and the United States as a whole: Do FTAs serve or impede U.S. long term national interests and trade policy objectives? Which type of FTA meets U.S. national interests? Are FTAs a substitute or a complement to U.S. commitments and interests in promoting a multilateral trading system via the World Trade Organization (WTO)?

This report will monitor pending and possible proposals for U.S. FTAs, relevant legislation and other congressional interest in U.S. FTAs. The report will be revised as events warrant.

What are Free Trade Areas?

Free trade areas are part of the broad category of trade arrangements under which member-countries grant one another preferential treatment in trade. Preferential trade arrangements include:

- **free trade areas** (FTAs) under which member countries agree to eliminate tariffs and nontariff barriers on trade in goods within the FTA, but each country maintains its own trade policies, including tariffs on trade outside the region;
- **customs unions** in which members conduct free trade among themselves and maintain common tariffs and other trade policies outside the arrangement;
- **common markets** in which member countries go beyond a customs union by eliminating barriers to labor and capital flows across national borders within the market; and
- **economic unions** where members merge their economies even further by establishing a common currency, and therefore a unified monetary policy, along with other common economic institutions. The European Union is the most significant example of a group of countries that has gone from a customs union to an economic union.¹

The process in forming an FTA usually begins with discussions between trading partners to ascertain the feasibility of forming an FTA. If they agree to go forward, then the countries undertake negotiations on what the FTA would look like. At a minimum, participants in an FTA agree to eliminate tariffs and some other nontariff trade barriers and agree to do so over a specific time period. In addition, the partner countries usually agree on rules of origin, that is a definition of what constitutes a product manufactured within the FTA and therefore is eligible to receive duty-free and other preferential trade treatment. Rules of origin prevent products from nonmembers entering an FTA market over the lowest tariff wall. Most FTAs also include procedures on the settlement of disputes arising among members and rules on the implementation of border controls, such as product safety certification and sanitary and phytosanitary requirements. Most recent FTAs contain rules on economic activities besides trade in goods, including foreign investment, intellectual property rights protection, treatment of labor and environment, and trade in services. The size and complexity of the FTA will largely reflect the size and complexity of the

¹ Besides the arrangements described above under which member countries extend *reciprocal* preferential treatment, there are trade arrangements under which one party agrees to extend nonreciprocal preferential treatment to the imports of a country or group of countries unilaterally. Such arrangements involve primarily developed countries extending nonreciprocal preferential treatment to the imports from developing countries. For example, the United States employs the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), the Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA), the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The main objective of these nonreciprocal arrangements is to encourage economic development in developing countries.

economic relations. U.S. FTAs with Israel and Jordan are relatively basic, while the NAFTA is very complex.

Why Countries Form FTAs

Countries form free trade areas for a number of economic and political reasons. Most basically, by eliminating tariffs and some nontariff barriers, FTAs permit the products of FTA partners easier access to one another's markets. The 1989 FTA between the United States and Canada was arguably formed for this purpose. Developed countries have also formed FTAs with developing countries to encourage them toward trade and investment liberalization.

FTAs may be used to protect local exporters from losing out to foreign companies that might receive preferential treatment under other FTAs. For example, some supporters of a U.S.-Chile FTA have argued that U.S. firms are at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their Canadian competitors whose exports face no Chilean tariffs under the Canada-Chile FTA. Slow progress in multilateral negotiations has been another impetus for FTAs. For example, when the 1986-1994 Uruguay Round negotiations got bogged down, the impetus for the United States, Mexico, and Canada to form NAFTA seemed to increase. Arguably the surge in FTA formation worldwide in the past few years has been a result of the difficulties in launching a new round in the WTO.

Political considerations are also a motivation to form FTAs. The United States formed FTAs with Israel and, most recently, with Jordan to reaffirm American support of those countries and to strengthen relations with them.

FTAs in the Context of U.S. Trade Policy

Post-World War II trade policy under various presidential administrations has had several interrelated objectives. One has been to secure open markets for U.S. exports. A second has been to protect domestic producers from foreign unfair trade practices and from rapid surges in fairly traded imports. A third has been to control trade for foreign policy and national security reasons. A fourth objective has been to help foster global trade to promote world economic growth.

In fulfilling these objectives, U.S. political leaders have formed and conducted trade policy along three tracks. One track has been the use of multilateral negotiations to establish and develop a rules-based trading system. The United States was a major player in the development and signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1948. It was a leader in eight rounds of negotiations that have expanded the coverage of GATT and that led to the establishment in 1995 of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the body that administers the GATT and other multilateral trade agreements. The United States has continued this approach by leading the effort in launching another round at the November 2001 WTO Ministerial in Doha, Qatar.

U.S. policymakers have used a second track which can be labeled the “unilateral” track. Unlike traditional negotiations where partners make balancing concessions, under this approach, the United States used threats of retaliation, usually in the form of restricting trade partners’ access to the vast U.S. market, in order to get the partner to open its markets to U.S. exports or to cease other offensive commercial practices and policies. The United States has employed this approach primarily against foreign practices not covered by GATT/WTO rules or because the multilateral dispute settlement process proved too slow and ineffective to meet U.S. needs. For several decades, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the United States conducted its trade policy with Japan “unilaterally” to get Japan to amend domestic laws, regulations and practices that prevented U.S. exporters from securing what they considered to be a fair share of the Japanese market.

More and more, however, U.S. trade policy is becoming dominated by a third track— bilateral and regional negotiations to establish FTAs. The United States completed its first FTA with Israel in 1985 under President Reagan. It completed its second with Canada under President Bush in 1989, whose Administration was involved in the process of expanding it to Mexico, a process that was completed by the Clinton Administration in 1993. However, even after the completion of NAFTA, it was still unclear whether bilateral and regional FTAs had become a fixture in U.S. foreign trade policymaking or anomalies to cement already strong economic relationships.

By 1994 it seemed apparent that FTAs were becoming a fixture when the United States, under the Clinton Administration, led a group of trade ministers from 33 other Western Hemispheric countries in agreeing to work toward establishing a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005. In the same year, political leaders from the United States and other member-countries of the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum signed a declaration in Bogor, Indonesia, to work toward free trade and investment in the region by 2010 for developed countries and by 2020 for all member-countries.

The pursuit of FTAs continued when, on June 6, 2000, President Clinton and Jordanian King Abdullah announced that their two countries would begin negotiations on establishing a free trade area. An agreement was quickly reached and was signed on October 24, 2001. Similarly, President Clinton and Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong announced, somewhat unexpectedly, on November 16, 2000, that their two nations would launch negotiations to complete a free trade agreement. And on December 6, 2000, the United States and Chile started negotiations to establish an FTA. Chile had long been mentioned as a potential addition to NAFTA or as a partner in a stand-alone FTA.

In the meantime, many countries, including the other major trading powers, were actively negotiating free trade agreements. The WTO has reported that since 1995 it has received notification of more than 100 FTAs, roughly more than double the number that was reported to the GATT from 1947 to 1995. For example, Canada formed an FTA with Chile as did Mexico. The EU has formed FTAs with a number of countries. Japan, which had shunned the use of FTAs, recently completed negotiations with Singapore and is exploring the possibility of forming an FTA with Korea.

Bush Administration Policy and Recent Developments

The Bush Administration has affirmed the strategy of pursuing U.S. trade policy goals through the multilateral trade system but is giving strong emphasis to building bilateral and regional trade ties through free trade agreements. Lamenting that the United States was involved in only two FTAs while most of its major trading partners were negotiating many more, USTR Robert Zoellick stated early in the Administration:

America's absence from the proliferation of trade accords hurts our exporters... If other countries go ahead with free trade agreements and the United States does not, we must blame ourselves. We have to get back into the game and take the lead. We are certainly in a position to do so. Indeed, the United States will be pursuing a number of regional free trade agreements in the years ahead, though not to the exclusion of global talks and the WTO process. The fact that the United States can move on multiple fronts increases our leverage in the global round, just as the Clinton Administration used the North American Free Trade Agreement and the APEC summit to help squeeze the European Union to complete the Uruguay Round of GATT.²

Zoellick has also stated, "By moving on multiple fronts, [the United States] can create a *competition in liberalization* (italics added) that will increase U.S. leverage and promote open markets in our hemisphere and around the world."³

The Bush Administration has continued negotiations that the Clinton Administration initiated. Both the Chile and Singapore negotiations were expected to proceed smoothly and rapidly, but some issues have arisen that have delayed their completion. For example, U.S. negotiators have raised concerns about the operations of state-owned enterprises in Singapore, rules of origin especially regarding the possible transshipment of textiles from third countries through Singapore, and the adjudication of disputes between foreign investors and host governments.⁴ In the U.S.-Chile negotiations, the United States has been sensitive to the treatment of agricultural products and Chile's protection of intellectual property rights. Chile has been concerned about U.S. antidumping measures.⁵ In both sets of negotiations, the treatment of labor and environment-related issues in trade agreements has been an overarching issue. Nevertheless, both sets of negotiations are expected to be completed sometime in 2002.

² Office of the United States Trade Representative. *2001 Trade Policy Agenda and 2000 Annual Report*. Washington. 2001. p. 4.

³ Statement of the Honorable Robert B. Zoellick, United States Trade Representative. Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Trade of the House Committee on Ways and Means. Hearing on Summit of the Americas and Prospects for Free Trade in the Hemisphere. May 8, 2001.

⁴ For more details, see *Singapore-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*. CRS Report RS20755.

⁵ For details, see *A U.S.-Chile Free Trade Agreement: Economic and Trade Policy Issues*. CRS Report RL31144.

President Bush reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to complete negotiations on the FTAA. At the 2001 Summit in Quebec, he and the other leaders adopted draft agreements in 9 negotiating areas that are designed to form the basis of final negotiations. The nine areas are: market access; agriculture; investment; services; government procurement; intellectual property rights; subsidies, antidumping, and countervailing duty; competition policy; and dispute settlement.⁶ In addition, President Bush participated in the October 2001 APEC leaders meeting in Shanghai recommitting the United States support of fulfilling the objectives of the Bogor Declaration.⁷

In addition to pursuing negotiations on FTAs launched by its predecessors, the Bush Administration intends to broaden the use of FTAs as a policy instrument. On January 16, 2002, in a speech before the Organization of American States (OAS), the President announced that the United States would explore the possibility of establishing an FTA with five Central American countries—Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. During a 10-day trip in February 2002, USTR Zoellick discussed with officials in South Africa and other countries in the region the possibility of forming an FTA .

Other countries are interested in, at a minimum, discussing the possibilities for forming FTAs with the United States. For example, in several meetings with President Bush, Australian Prime Minister Howard raised the subject of his country's interest in such an endeavor and the two leaders instructed their ministers to study the possibility. To date formal negotiations have not begun. A coalition of Australian and U.S. business groups and some Members of Congress have promoted the formation of an FTA, while a number of U.S. agricultural groups have opposed it.⁸ Others countries that have expressed interest or have been proposed as FTA partners of the United States include New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan, and Egypt.⁹

Economic Impact of FTAs

The surge in U.S. interest in FTAs and in the formation of FTAs worldwide raises the question of their impact on the countries included in an FTA and on the rest of the world. It is an issue that economists have long studied and debated. Interest in the issue has peaked at various times in the post-World War II period. The first time was the formation of the European Common market. Interest has peaked again with the current trends in FTAs. The debate has relied largely on theory since empirical data are scarce save for the experience of the European Union. The debate

⁶ For details, see *A Free Trade Area of the Americas: Status of Negotiations and Major Policy Issues*. CRS Report RS20864.

⁷ For details, see *Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Free Trade, and the 2001 Summit in Shanghai*. CRS Report RL31035.

⁸ *International Trade Reporter*. September 19, 2001. p. 1434-1435.

⁹ *Inside U.S. Trade*. August 10, 2001. Inbom Choi and Jeffrey J. Schott. *Free Trade Between Korea and the United States?* Institute for International Economics. May 2001. 130p. Bureau of National Affairs. *Daily Report for Executives*. November 6, 2001.

has also divided economists between those who strongly oppose FTAs as an economically inefficient mechanism and those who support them as a means to build freer trade.

Economists usually based their analysis of the impact of FTAs on the concepts of *trade creation* and *trade diversion*. These concepts were first developed by economist Jacob Viner in 1950.¹⁰ Viner focused his work on the economic effects of customs unions, but his conclusions have been largely applied to FTAs and other preferential trade arrangements. His analysis was also confined to static (one-time) effects of these arrangements.

Trade creation occurs when a member of an FTA replaces domestic production of a good with imports of the good from another member of the FTA, because the formation of the FTA has made it cheaper to import rather than produce domestically. The creation of the trade is said to improve economic welfare within the group because resources are being shifted to more efficient uses. Trade diversion occurs when a member of an FTA switches its import of a good from an efficient nonmember to a less efficient member because the removal of tariffs within the group and the continuation of tariffs on imports from nonmembers make it cheaper to do so. Trade diversion is said to reduce economic welfare because resources are being diverted from an efficient producer to a less efficient producer.

In most cases, it appears that FTAs lead to both trade diversion and creation with the net effects determined by the structure of the FTA. Therefore, even if two or more countries are moving toward freer trade among themselves in an FTA, the FTA could make those countries and the world as a whole worse off if the FTA diverts more trade than it creates, according to economic theory.¹¹ (See box for illustrative examples of trade diversion and trade creation.)

Trade policymakers encounter circumstances much more complicated than what are depicted in economic theory. Many functioning and proposed FTAs encompass more than two countries and involve a range of products, both goods and services, making it much more challenging to evaluate their economic impact. To provide an analytical framework, some economists have developed sets of conditions under which, they have concluded, an FTA would create more trade than it diverts. They state that trade creation is likely to exceed trade diversion –

- the larger the tariffs or other trade barriers among members before the FTA is formed;
- the lower the tariffs and other barriers in trade with nonmembers;

¹⁰ Viner, Jacob. *The Customs Union Issue*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 1950. New York.

¹¹ This conclusion is called the General Theory of the Second Best and was developed by economists Richard Lipsey and Kelvin Lancaster. Lipsey, Richard and Kelvin Lancaster. *The General Theory of the Second Best*. *Review of Economic Studies*. vol 24. p. 11-32. Cited and discussed in Lawrence, Robert Z. *International National Economies: Regionalism, Multilateralism, and Deeper Integration*. Brookings Institution. Washington. 1996. p. 22.

Trade Creation or Trade Diversion?

Economist Robert Z. Lawrence has provided the following example to illustrate the difference between trade creation and trade diversion:

“Assume that prior to implementing a free trade agreement with the United States, all television sets purchased in Mexico are subject to a tariff of 10 percent. Assume that Japan produces TVs under competitive conditions, which it sells at a cost of \$100, but the United States could only produce such sets at \$105. Initially, all TVs sold in Mexico and elsewhere would be Japanese. These would be imported at a price of \$100 from Japan and sold to Mexican consumers for \$110, with the additional \$10 representing the tariff that would be paid by Mexican consumers to the Mexican government. Assume now that a free trade agreement is signed between Mexico and the United States which removes tariffs between Mexico and the United States but retains Mexican tariffs on other countries. Mexican consumers will now have a choice between buying American TVs, which will sell in Mexico at \$105, or Japanese TVs, which will sell at \$110. They will buy the U.S. TVs and be better off. However, the Mexican economy as a whole will be worse off. Before the agreement, Mexico bought TVs from Japan. Although consumers paid \$110, \$10 was just a transfer from Mexican consumers to the Mexican government. The economy as a whole, therefore, spent \$100 per TV. After the agreement, however, Mexico is spending \$105 per TV. TV prices in Mexico do not reflect their social opportunity costs. The impact of the agreement is to expand TV production in the United States, which is relatively less efficient, and to reduce it in Japan, which is relatively more efficient.

“Of course, not all of the increased trade between partners will represent expansion from a less efficient source. Pure trade creation would also result. Assume in the example that initially Mexico could produce TV sets for \$107. In this case, prior to the agreement Mexico would not have imported them from Japan, instead it would have supplied these TV sets domestically. In this case, Mexico would benefit from the agreement, which would allow it [to] pay only \$105 per TV, although of course it would have done better by liberalizing fully and buying the sets from Japan.”

Source: Lawrence, Robert Z. *International National Economies: Regionalism, Multilateralism, and Deeper Integration*. Brookings Institution. Washington.

- the greater the number of countries included in the FTA;

- the more competitive or the less complementary the economies joining the FTA; and
- the closer the economic relationship among the members before the FTA was formed.¹²

Economists also have determined that, along with the immediate, static effects of trade diversion and creation, FTAs generate long-term dynamic effects that might include:

- increased efficiency of production as producers face increased competition with the removal of trade barriers;
- economies of scale, that is decreased unit costs of production as producers can have larger production runs since the markets for their goods have been enlarged; and
- increased foreign investment from outside the FTA as firms seek to locate operations within the borders of the FTA to take advantage of the preferential trade arrangements.¹³

Until recently not many FTAs were in operation; therefore, available data on their impact have been limited to the experience of the formation of the European Common Market and subsequently the European Union. Most studies have concluded that the European Community has resulted in more trade creation than trade diversion, but in some sectors such as agriculture, the net effect has been trade diversion because of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy that raised barriers to agricultural trade outside the EU.¹⁴

FTAs and the WTO

A basic principle of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that is administered by the WTO is the most-favored nation (MFN) principle. Article I of GATT requires that “any advantage, favour, privilege, or immunity granted by any contracting party to any product originating in or destined for any other country shall be accorded immediately and unconditionally to the like product originating in or destined for the territories of all other contracting parties.” FTAs, by definition, violate the MFN principle, since products of FTA member countries are given preferential treatment over nonmember products. However, the original GATT signatories recognized that FTAs and customs unions, while violating the MFN

¹² Salvatore, Dominick. *International Economics*. Fifth Edition. Prentice Hall. Englewoods Cliffs, New Jersey. 1995. p. 305-306.

¹³ Ibid., p.307.

¹⁴ CRS Report 97-663 E. *Regional Trade Agreements: Implications for U.S. Policy*, by George Holliday. p. 11.

principle, improve economic welfare of all members, if certain conditions are met to minimize trade diversion.

Article XXIV of the GATT requires that FTA members shall not erect higher or more restrictive tariff or nontariff barriers on trade with nonmembers than existed prior to the formation of the FTA. Furthermore, Article XXIV requires the elimination of tariffs and other trade restrictions be applied to “substantially all the trade between the constituent territories in products originating in such territories.” In addition, Article XXIV stipulates that the elimination of duties and other trade restrictions on trade within the FTA to be accomplished “within a reasonable length of time,” meaning a period of no longer than 10 years, according to the “Understanding of the Interpretation of Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade” reached during the Uruguay Round. Member countries are required to report to the WTO their intention to form FTAs. In addition to Article XXIV, the “Enabling Clause,” agreed to by GATT signatories in 1979, allows developing countries to form preferential trading arrangements without the conditions under Article XXIV.

Article V of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the agreement that governs trade in services under the WTO, provides for the preferential treatment of trade in services within FTAs or similar regional trading arrangement. Article V lays out requirements of substantial coverage of the elimination of trade restrictions and the prohibition on the *ex post facto* imposition of higher restrictions on services trade with nonmember countries.

The WTO formed the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA) in 1996 to review pending and operating FTAs and customs unions to determine whether they conform to WTO rules under the GATT and the GATS. However, the rules are sufficiently ambiguous as to be the subject of continuing debate within the CRTA. For example, the members have been unable to agree on what constitutes “substantially all trade” under Article XXIV (GATT) or “substantially all sectors” under Article V (GATS).¹⁵ Some 239 regional trade agreements, primarily FTAs but also custom unions, have been notified to the GATT/WTO. Of these, 206 were notified under Article XXIV of the GATT, of which 124 are still in operation; 18 were notified under the Enabling Clause; and 15 notified under Article V under the GATS. Some 109 agreements are currently under examination by the CRTA with the examination reports on 69 of the FTAs in their final draft stages.

Yet, none of the reports has been completed because CRTA members have not been able to reach a consensus on any of them. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the FTAs have gone into operation. For example, the CRTA has not completed its report on NAFTA, which went into effect in January 1994. The proliferation of FTAs and disagreements on rules have crippled the WTO review process and led WTO members to place review of the rules on regional agreements on the agenda for the new round of negotiations, the so-called Doha Development Round. The Doha Ministerial Declaration, which established the agenda for the new round, states that

¹⁵ The CRTA meets several times during the year.

the negotiations will strive at “clarifying and improving disciplines and procedures under the existing WTO provisions applying to regional trade agreements.”

The Debate Over FTAs

Interest in a new wave of FTAs is driving a spirited debate among experts, policymakers, and other observers over whether they promote or damage U.S. economic interests and the economic interests of the world at large. The differing views can be categorized into three main groups. One group consists of those who oppose FTAs because, they assert, FTAs undermine the development of the multilateral trading system and act as a “stumbling block” to global trade liberalization. A second group supports FTAs because, they believe, FTAs act as a “building block” to multilateral trade liberalization. The third category are those individuals and groups that are opposed to trade liberalization in general because they believe trade liberalization’s impact on workers in import-sensitive sectors or on the environment is unacceptable, or because, they assert, it undermines U.S. sovereignty.

Among representatives of the first group of experts are international economists Jagdish Bhagwati and Anne O. Krueger, who have strongly advocated that the United States and other national governments should not pursue FTAs at the expense of multilateral negotiations in the WTO. Bhagwati has concluded that FTAs are by definition discriminatory and therefore trade diverting. He argues that, tariffs remain high on many goods imported into developing countries and even on some labor-intensive goods (such as wearing apparel and agricultural products) imported into developed countries. Consequently, he asserts, trade diversion will likely result when an FTA is formed. Bhagwati argues that firms actually prefer bilateral or regional FTAs to multilateral trade liberalization because they are able to achieve preferential treatment over their non-member country competitors.¹⁶

Both Bhagwati and Krueger cite the “rules of origin” and other conditions of an FTA’s establishment for strong criticism. Bhagwati claims, for example, that the rules of origin in one FTA more than likely do not coincide with the rules of origin in many of the other FTAs. Furthermore, he argues, the schedule of implementation of the tariff reductions and other conditions for one FTA will not match the schedule of other FTAs. The incongruity of these regulations across FTAs has created what Bhagwati sees as a customs administration nightmare and calls the spaghetti-bowl phenomenon.¹⁷

In her criticism, Krueger claims that in order to meet the input thresholds of rules of origin requirements, producers in one FTA partner will be encouraged to purchase as many inputs as possible from other partner countries, even if a non-FTA member can produce and sell the inputs more cheaply and even if the tariff rate on inputs from non-FTA producers is zero. Importing inputs from within the FTA to meet the rules

¹⁶ Bhagwati, Jagdish. *The Wind of the Hundred Days: How Washington Mismanaged Globalization*. The MIT Press. Cambridge, Mass. 2000. p. 240-245.

¹⁷ Ibid.

of origin threshold allows the producer to sell the final product within the FTA duty free. Under such circumstances imports of inputs are diverted from efficient producers outside the FTA to less efficient producers inside the FTA. A corollary to Krueger's conclusion is that the higher the threshold established in the rules of origin, the greater the chance that trade diversion will take place.¹⁸

A range of economists, policymakers, and other experts embrace a second view that FTAs can enhance trade and should be pursued. Economist Robert Z. Lawrence argues, for example, that recent FTAs involve much more economic integration than the elimination of tariffs. NAFTA, he points out, has led to the reduction in barriers on services trade, foreign investment, and other economic activities not covered by the GATT/WTO. In addition, under NAFTA, Mexico has affirmed its commitment to economic reform, making its economy more efficient. Lawrence asserts that the theory traditionally applied to FTAs (by Bhagwati, Krueger, and others) does not take into account these dynamic welfare enhancing characteristics of FTAs which he believes are likely to outweigh any trade diversion that results from the elimination of tariffs.¹⁹

A CATO Institute study by economist Edward L. Hudgins argues that while it may be preferable to liberalize trade multilaterally, countries should take any available avenue, including bilateral or regional FTAs, to do so, even if they lead to some trade diversion. Furthermore, Hudgins asserts that FTAs can be more efficient vehicles for addressing difficult trade barriers than the WTO, where the large membership requires compromise to the least common denominator to achieve consensus. FTAs have also provided momentum for GATT/WTO members to move ahead with new trade rounds, he claims.²⁰

Economist C. Fred Bergsten holds a position similar to the one expressed in the CATO study, that in lieu of multilateral trade negotiations, FTAs are the next best thing and promote global trade liberalization. Bergsten has advocated establishing U.S. FTAs with New Zealand, and with South Korea. Economist Jeffrey Schott argues that some U.S. firms are being discriminated against because FTAs are rapidly forming in which the United States is not a participant; therefore, in his review, the United must negotiate FTAs. He cites the example of Canadian firms which have

¹⁸ Krueger, Anne O. "Free Trade Agreements As Protectionist Devices: Rules of Origin. in Melvin, James R., James C. Moore and Raymond Riezman (eds.). *Trade, Theory, and Econometrics: Essays in Honor of John C. Chipman*. Routledge Press. New York. 1999. p. 91- 101.

¹⁹ Lawrence, Robert Z. *Regionalism, Multilateralism, and Deeper Integration: Changing Paradigms for Developing Countries*. in Mendoza, Miguel Rodriguez, Patrick Low, and Barbara Kotschwar (eds.). *Trade Rules in the Making*. Organization of American States/Brookings Institution Press. Washington. 1999. p. 41-45.

²⁰ Hudgins, Edward L. Regional and Multilateral Trade Agreements: Complementary Means to Open Markets. *Cato Journal*. Vol. 15. No. 23. Fall/Winter 1995/96.

obtained competitive advantages over American firms because Canada has an FTA with Chile.²¹

Bergsten and others have also advocated structuring FTAs in a manner that could serve as building blocks of a global free trade system. Using the APEC plan as a model, Bergsten argues for an FTA based on “open regionalism,” that is establishing the road map for free trade and investment in the Asian-Pacific region for 2010/2020 among the members but allowing other countries to join if they agree to accede to the conditions. In order to minimize trade diversion, he suggests that trade and investment could be implemented on an MFN principle, perhaps conditional MFN in order to limit the “free rider” effects. Other countries, and other regional groupings, Bergsten presumes, would be willing to accept the conditions having been enticed by the trade and investment opportunities until most of the membership of the WTO would be engaged in forming a free trade area.²² A Heritage Foundation report draws up a similar proposal for a “Global Free Trade Association.”²³

A third group opposes FTAs but also trade liberalization or “globalization” in general. Included in this group are representatives of import-sensitive industries, for example labor unions, and representatives of social action groups such as some environmentalists, who question the wisdom of trade liberalization whether done through multilateral negotiations or through bilateral and regional trading arrangements. They assert that trade liberalization unfairly affects workers by exporting jobs to countries with lower wages and undermines the nation’s ability to protect the environment by allowing companies to relocate to countries with less stringent environmental regulations.²⁴ For example, the United Auto Workers (UAW) union has stated the following position regarding the FTAA:

Such an agreement would provide broader protections for the rights of corporations, further undermine the ability of governments in the region to regulate their economies in the interests of their citizens and intensify the downward pressure on workers’ incomes through competition for jobs and investments. All of this would take place in the absence of any counter-balancing protections for workers, consumers or the environment. This is why the UAW has consistently opposed the direction of these negotiations, the positions taken by the U.S.

²¹ Schott, Jeffrey J. *Free Trade Agreements: The Cost of U.S. Nonparticipation*. Testimony before the Subcommittee on Trade. House Ways and Means Committee. March 29, 2001. [<http://www.iie.com>].

²² Bergsten, C. Fred. *Open Regionalism*. Working paper 97. Institute for International Economics. 1997.

²³ Hulsman, John C. and Aaron Schavey. *The Global Free Trade Association: A New Trade Agenda*. The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 1441. May 16, 2001.

²⁴ For more information, see for example, the United Auto Workers positions on trade policy at [<http://www.uaw.com>] and the positions of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch at [<http://www.citizen.org>].

government, and worked closely with other organizations in the region to oppose the creation of an FTAA.²⁵

Relevant Legislation

A number of bills have been introduced in the 107th Congress supporting ongoing negotiations or proposing new negotiations for FTAs. As negotiations are completed and free trade agreements signed, the implementing bills will be introduced in the Congress and will have to be acted on before an FTA can go into effect. In September 2001, the Congress passed the implementing bill for the U.S.-Jordan FTA (H.R. 2603). In addition, on December 6, 2001, the House passed H.R. 3005 which would grant the President trade promotion authority (TPA), or fast-track authority. The authority would apply to all agreements reached during a specific time-period, including bilateral and regional free trade agreements. On December 18, 2001, the Senate Finance Committee ordered its version of the bill reported. The negotiations on the U.S. FTAs with Singapore and Chile are expected to be completed sometime before the end of the 107th Congress. Other relevant legislation includes the following:

- S. 137 (Gramm)– The Americas Free Trade Act. The bill would require the President to initiate trade agreement negotiations with Western Hemisphere countries to reduce and eliminate tariffs and nontariff trade barriers and the establishment of a Western Hemisphere Free Trade Area. The legislation would apply fast-track trade procedures to a bill implementing an agreement resulting from the negotiations. The bill was introduced January 22, 2001 and was referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- S. 138 (Gramm)– The Chile-NAFTA Accession Act. The bill would authorize the President to enter into an agreement that would lead to Chile’s accession to NAFTA or to enter into a bilateral free trade agreement with Chile. Implementing legislation for either agreement would receive fast-track treatment. The bill was introduced on January 22, 2001, and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- S. 140 (Gramm)– The United Kingdom-NAFTA Accession Act. The bill would authorize the President to enter into an agreement that would lead to the United Kingdom’s accession to NAFTA or to enter into a bilateral free trade agreement with the United Kingdom. Legislation to implement either agreement would receive fast-track legislative treatment. The bill was introduced on January 22, 2001, and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- S. 586 (Dodd)– The Chile Fast Track Act of 2001. The bill would authorize the President to enter into an agreement for Chile’s accession to NAFTA or an agreement to eventually establish a free trade area with Chile. Furthermore, the bill would authorize the inclusion of trade-related labor and environmental

²⁵ [<http://www.uaw.com>].

protection standards in any bills submitted to Congress implementing such agreements. Fast-track procedures would apply to any bills implementing agreements reached under this act. The bill was introduced on March 21, 2001 and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.

- S. 935 (Baucus)– United States-Commonwealth of Australia Free Trade Agreement Act of 2001 would authorize the President to enter into an FTA with Australia and for the implementing legislation to be considered under fast-track procedures. The bill was introduced on May 23, 2001 and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- S. 943 (Baucus)– United States-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement Act of 2001 would authorize the President to enter into an FTA with New Zealand and for the implementing legislation to be considered under fast-track procedures. The bill was introduced on May 23, 2001 and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- S. 944 (Baucus)– United States-Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement Act of 2001 would authorize the President to enter into an FTA with Korea and for the implementing legislation to be considered under fast-track procedures. The bill was introduced on May 23, 2001 and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- S. 1104 (Graham)– Trade Promotion Act of 2001 would authorize fast-track procedures for certain legislation to implement multilateral agreements and bilateral and regional trade agreements. The bill was introduced on June 6, 2001 and was referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- S. 1636 (Baucus)– United States-Taiwan Free Trade Agreement Act of 2001 authorizes the President to enter into an FTA with Taiwan and for the implementing legislation to be considered under fast-track procedures. The bill was introduced on November 6, 2001 and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- S. 2005 (Lugar)– The United States-Republic of the Philippines Free Trade Agreement Act would authorize the President to enter into an FTA with the Philippines and require the implementing legislation to be considered under fast-track procedures. The bill was introduced on March 11, 2002 and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.
- H.R. 1566 (Leach)– The bill would urge the President to initiate consultations with Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand to determine the feasibility and desirability of negotiations to create a free trade area. The bill was introduced on April 4, 2001 and referred to the House Ways and Means trade subcommittee on May 3.

Conclusions and Implications for Congress

Free trade agreements are viewed by many as a significant trade policy vehicle for the United States and for other major trading nations. Over the last 5-10 years, the debate in U.S. trade policy has shifted from, “Should the United States form FTAs?” to “Should the United States form any more FTAs and, if so, with whom, when, and under what conditions?” Congress has a direct role in addressing those questions. Before any FTA can go into effect, the Congress must review it as part of implementing legislation. The Congress likely will soon be asked by the Bush Administration to approve FTAs with Chile and Singapore. In addition, discussions are moving toward FTAA, and many new FTA negotiations are being proposed.

A number of questions will likely arise as Members consider legislation on FTAs and as they evaluate operating FTAs through their oversight responsibilities. One question pertains to the economic impact of an FTA. As with any trade liberalizing measure, an FTA can have positive effects on some sectors and adverse effects on others. An FTA may create trade for one sector of the U.S. economy but divert trade away from others. A Member of Congress is placed in the position of weighing the effects on his/her constituency versus the overall impact on the United States and other trading partners. Because conditions can differ radically from one FTA to another, the evaluation will likely differ in each case. Furthermore, Members might take into account not only the immediate static effects of FTAs but also the long-term, dynamic effects which could play an important role in evaluating their contribution to U.S. economy.

A second, broader question is whether bilateral and regional FTAs are the appropriate trade policy strategy to promote U.S. national interests. Economic specialists differ sharply on this question with some viewing the proliferation of FTAs as leading to confusion and serving as stumbling blocks to the development of a rules-based multilateral trading system. Other specialists consider FTAs as appropriate trade policy vehicles for promoting freer trade, as building blocks to a multilateral system and as necessary to protect U.S. interests against the FTAs that other countries are forming without the United States. Still others oppose trade liberalization in any form as counter to U.S. interests.

A third question is whether the Office of the United States Trade Representative and other trade policy agencies have sufficient time and human resources to negotiate a number of FTAs simultaneously while managing trade policy in the WTO and other fora. USTR Zoellick has clearly indicated that it can be done. Others might find some U.S. interests being short-changed.

A fourth question is to what degree, if any, should non-trade concerns be included in FTAs? This issue has emerged in a number of completed and ongoing FTA negotiations. The U.S.-Jordan Free Trade Agreement contains provisions regarding labor rights and environmental protection. Some opponents of the inclusion of such issues have argued that the U.S.- Jordan FTA is just an anomaly while proponents consider it a model for future FTAs.