

This PDF is a selection from a published volume from the National Bureau of Economic Research

Volume Title: Globalization in an Age of Crisis: Multilateral Economic Cooperation in the Twenty-First Century

Volume Author/Editor: Robert C. Feenstra and Alan M. Taylor, editors

Volume Publisher: University of Chicago Press

Volume ISBN: cloth: 978-0-226-03075-3

eISBN: 978-0-226-03089-0

Volume URL: <http://www.nber.org/books/feen11-1>

Conference Date: September 15-16, 2011

Publication Date: December 2013

Chapter Title: Panel discussion

Chapter Author(s): Charlene Barshefsky

Chapter URL: <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c12865>

Chapter pages in book: (p. 385 - 387)



---

Charlene Barshefsky

---

In these remarks, I will discuss the four broad trends that bear upon the politics of trade and globalization. In the second part of my discussion, I will highlight a couple of questions on the horizon.

The first and perhaps most general of these trends is the accelerated pace of global growth and global economic integration in the second part of the twentieth century. The global economy grew tenfold between 1950 and 2000, accelerating at an even more rapid rate prior to the financial crisis of 2008. That rate of increase in global economic activity had previously taken several hundred years to achieve. There are countless factors lying behind this rapid pace of growth; the information and communication technologies (ICT) revolution has doubtless been one of them, as one of the papers presented at this conference made clear. Accompanying this period of rapid growth is intensified global competition—a function of technology, capital flows, and trade.

One of the most important actors in this growth story, which brings me to the second important trend, has been the reemergence of China. Again, there are lots of reasons for the Chinese miracle, such as Deng Xiao Ping's policy shift, which led to early internal economic reforms—the decollectivization of farming, the creation of labor and product markets, and so on. Perhaps of greatest significance, however, has been the normalization of China's relations with its immediate neighbors, and the five important regional economic powers in particular: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Economic and political normalization resulted in the mesh-

Ambassador Charlene Barshefsky is senior international partner at WilmerHale, Washington, DC. She was the US trade representative from 1997 to 2001.

For acknowledgments, sources of research support, and disclosure of the author's material financial relationships, if any, please see <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c12865.ack>.

ing of China's low-cost economy and large labor reserves with capital and advanced technologies from its five wealthy Asian neighbors. The resulting economic benefits to China, the region, and the world are clear. Today, the expansion of interregional trade led by China has reduced the concentration risk to East Asia, in particular, of dependence on the US economy for growth.

China's growth has gone hand in hand with its growing diplomatic and political clout on the world stage. Using its now unrivaled agenda-setting power in the region (which used to unquestionably belong to Japan), China has exerted substantial influence. In this regard, China's domestic priorities often conflict with Western goals (currency policy or enforcement of intellectual property rights, just to name two), and with its massive trade surpluses, may raise the spectre of zero-sum outcomes.

China's economic reemergence coincides with a third trend—economic weakness and uncertainty in the West. The financial crisis exacerbated the situation: the West has experienced high unemployment, weak consumer confidence, austerity policies, global financial imbalances, and competitive devaluations. Recovery remains fragile even today. All of this comes at a time when global competition is stronger.

Fourth and lastly, jobs. The United States has long shed manufacturing jobs as technology and productivity increases in particular have altered the landscape. What has recently changed, however, is that white-collar discontent has begun to emerge. Hostility to globalization and trade is reflected in polling data. Even among those who accept that globalization and trade "are here to stay," there is significant concern over its pace and consequences—particularly job loss. Among people with a college degree or higher—the group traditionally most supportive of globalization—opinions sharply turn negative when domestic job losses are posited.

It has been noted that the WTO framework can be credited for the relative moderation in protectionist responses to deepened integration, China's reemergence, financial crisis, and job loss—the four broad trends referenced today. Despite this and other mitigating factors, profound concerns remain: a perceived decline in US competitiveness, the fear that our children's generation will do worse than their parents' generation, and the perception of the global economy as hostile territory. In light of these concerns, three areas bear watching in the future.

The first of these is the reemergence of industrial policy across the globe and the strengthening of state-dominated industries in many countries. The WTO is not well suited to addressing this development given the piecemeal nature of dispute settlement. Firms operating in these economies have faced and will face forced localization, indigenous innovation policies, and other pressures designed primarily to benefit and strengthen local producers at the expense of foreign competition and market-oriented forces. Second, natural resource hoarding has emerged as an area of concern, as global growth and

development has led to an explosion in energy demand, and states intervene to corner the market in mined ores and rare earth minerals. Third, the post–World War II international order is under increasing strain, with major economic players at odds over fundamental norms of commercial behavior and the role of the state. In this regard, I leave you with a somewhat rhetorical question: Who is in charge?