

**Committee:** United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

**Agenda:** Addressing the Security and Diplomatic Implications of Renewed U.S. Protectionist Policies in International Relations

**List of Countries:** Australia, Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, China, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, Indonesia, Japan, Nigeria, Norway, Russia, South Africa, State of Israel, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America

## I. General Overview



*Figure 1. The United Nations General Assembly Emblem*

### 1. Committee Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) serves as the main policy-making body of the UN, providing a forum for all 193 member states to discuss international issues. UNGA is specifically tasked with addressing matters related to global security and disarmament issues. UNGA is also responsible for electing non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, approving the UN budget, and appointing the Secretary-General on the recommendation of the Security Council.

The UNGA was established in 1945, the same year the United Nations was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War, to provide a forum for multilateral discussion. The UNGA's main goal of establishment was to provide a platform for all member states with an equal voice to debate, negotiate, and recommend solutions on issues that have broad implications for international peace and security.

Although UNGA resolutions are not legally binding, unlike those of the Security Council, they are powerful in setting global standards and can motivate action within the UN system. UNGA still carries significant political authority that plays a crucial role in shaping international norms, fostering cooperation, and promoting peace and security worldwide.

## **2. Significance of Agenda**

In today's interconnected global society, protectionist measures, particularly by major economies like the United States, have a significant overarching effect not only on trade but also on international security, diplomatic relationships, and global economic stability. Implementing protectionist policies may safeguard domestic industries and jobs, address perceived unfair trade practices by other nations, and enhance national security by reducing reliance on foreign supply chains. However, imposing high tariffs, quotas, or other trade barriers could trigger international tensions by disrupting supply chains and provoking retaliatory measures from other nations. Protectionist measures could consequently heighten security risks, as trade tensions and economic disparities have the potential to evolve into broader geopolitical confrontations.

Economic policies closely intersect with global security concerns and diplomatic norms. To resolve the international tension escalated by the trade policy discord and to maintain national security, member states can engage in constructive dialogue to identify strategies that balance national economic interests with international cooperation, peace, and stability. Furthermore, addressing this issue is critical for promoting trust and collaboration among the international community, enhancing equitable economic growth, and preventing potential conflicts that could arise from economic isolationism. Particularly, the agenda underscores how renewed U.S. protectionist policies under the current regime affect both global governance and the stability of international relations. Nations must safeguard their economic sovereignty while upholding the values of openness, cooperation, and mutual respect.

### **3. Key Terms**

#### **Protectionism**

Economic policy of restricting imports through tariffs, quotas, or regulations to protect domestic industries from foreign competition.

#### **Tariff**

A tax or duty imposed by a government on imported goods, often used to influence trade balances or protect domestic industries.

#### **National Security Exception**

A legal justification allowing countries to impose trade restrictions (such as tariffs) on imports deemed critical to national security.

#### **WTO (World Trade Organization)**

An international organization that regulates trade between nations, ensures compliance with trade rules, and resolves disputes.

#### **Export Controls**

Government-imposed restrictions on the export of certain goods, services, or technologies for national security, economic, or foreign policy reasons.

#### **Supply Chain Resilience**

Strategies and measures implemented to reduce vulnerability to disruptions in the production, transport, or delivery of essential goods.

#### **Economic Diplomacy**

The use of economic tools, such as tariffs, subsidies, and trade agreements, to achieve foreign policy and diplomatic objectives.

#### **Industrial Policy**

Government-led policies aimed at strengthening domestic industries, often including subsidies, incentives, or support for strategic sectors.

## **II. Historical Background**

For many years, the United States has been a driving force in building the global economic order based on free trade and multilateral collaboration. The United States pushed liberal economic policies that favored globalization, economic interdependence, and the free movement of goods and services through organizations such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and, later, the World Trade Organization (WTO). This strategy was viewed as a way to strengthen alliances, prevent violence through economic links, and expand American power globally.

Protectionism in the United States, however, has much deeper roots. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, high tariffs, such as those imposed by the Tariff of 1828 and the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, were employed to safeguard home industries against foreign competition. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff, in particular, exacerbated the Great Depression by causing retaliatory tariffs and harming world trade. After this incident, the consequences that protectionist policies had were clear.

Protectionism in the United States declined significantly after WWII, and was replaced by a push towards open markets. However, by the late twentieth century, economic globalization had sparked domestic opposition. Job outsourcing and weakening manufacturing sectors sparked political movements, many of which were demanding more economic sovereignty. The 2008 global financial crisis fueled these tensions.

The Trump administration (2017-2021) signaled a significant return to protectionism by imposing tariffs on steel, aluminum, and Chinese imports, withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and renegotiating trade agreements like NAFTA into the USMCA. These actions reflected a broader "America First" worldview that prioritized economic nationalism and a transactional approach to foreign affairs. They also sparked trade battles, damaged relations with allies, and spurred retaliation from major partners like China and the European Union.

Even after 2021, some of the US protectionism has lingered. The Biden administration has maintained certain tariffs on China while implementing industrial policies such as the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act, which prioritize domestic development

of essential technology. While framed as measures to improve economic security and reduce reliance on strategic rivals, these policies — especially the Inflation Reduction Act’s EV and clean-energy tax credits, and the CHIPS Act’s massive semiconductor subsidies — have reignited diplomatic and security tensions. China has lodged a WTO dispute (DS623) accusing the U.S. of discriminatory subsidies, U.S. allies have criticized the programs as trade-distorting, and the erosion of the WTO Appellate Body raises significant questions about the credibility of U.S. leadership in the global trade order.

### **III. Interested Parties**

#### **1. International Organizations**

##### **World Trade Organization (WTO)**

The World Trade Organization is the primary international body overseeing global trade rules and working through procedures to settle disputes. As U.S. protectionist policies, such as increased tariffs and restrictions on foreign investment, reshape global trade flows, the WTO plays a critical role in mediating disputes between the U.S. and other affected trading partner countries. Although its authority has weakened in recent years due to disputes that involve the Appellate Body, the WTO remains a key actor in determining the legitimacy of protectionist measures and in preventing escalation into broader diplomatic or security tensions.

##### **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) monitors global economic activity and stability and works to prevent global financial disruptions caused by sudden shifts in trade and investment policies. Renewed U.S. protectionism introduces potential risks to global supply chains, currency stability, and international investment patterns. As countries respond with countermeasures or move away from U.S.-centered trade networks, the IMF plays a crucial role in analyzing international consequences and advising governments on economic and security risks that are created by trade fragmentation.

##### **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development supports developing countries in navigating the international trade system and safeguarding their economic growth. Because the U.S. protectionist policies often impact developing countries with export-dependent economies in disproportionate ways, UNCTAD provides them with guidance, research, and policy recommendations to help states mitigate economic downfalls. UNCTAD also works to promote multilateral trade and cooperation and prevent diplomatic strain that can occur when major powers employ restrictive trade measures, such as the U.S. protectionist policies.

Developing countries with export-dependent economies are particularly vulnerable to these restrictions. Using African and Latin American economies as an example, these economies hinge on the prosperity of U.S. or Chinese export markets. If the supply chains face adversity, these nations face an increased risk of economic recession.

Protectionist measures in clean energy industries increase barriers for technological entry, widening the gap between advanced economies and smaller states. Additionally, competition over strategic minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements may place undue pressure on resource extraction and even provoke proxy economic conflicts. UNCTAD provides these countries with tailored guidance and policy recommendations to help mitigate such risks while supporting sustainable economic growth.

## **2. Nation States**

### **The United States**

The United States is the primary player and driver of renewed protectionist policies, as the U.S. implemented measures such as tariffs, reshoring incentives, and national security-based export controls, which significantly reshaped global trade dynamics. These policies were implemented with the intent to strengthen domestic industries and reduce reliance on strategic competitors in the U.S. However, they have also created many diplomatic strains with allies and large trading partners who view these actions as economically harmful or detrimental. As various nations respond with their own policies or as they reevaluate their strategic partnerships to maintain their economies, the U.S. now finds itself navigating a complex environment in which its economic decisions carry major political, security, and diplomatic consequences for not only its own nation and economy, but those of global trade partners as well.

## **China**

China is one of the countries that is the most heavily affected by the U.S.'s new policies regarding protectionism, with 14.8% of the nation's exports arriving in the U.S. in 2024. This is particularly true in high technology sectors, such as semiconductors, telecommunications, and advanced manufacturing. American restrictions on technology transfers, investment screening, and export controls have not only slowed certain segments of China's economic growth but have also pushed China to shift focus to domestic self-reliance for economic growth and to strengthen alternative economic partnerships, especially with countries in Asia, Africa, and the Global South. As tensions rise between the U.S. and China, China's diplomatic response, countermeasures, and changes in trade partners and strategies play a major role in shaping the broader geopolitical landscape on the global level and on the stability of international economic relationships.

## **European Union (EU)**

The European Union and its member countries are close U.S. allies, and, as a result, become one of the most disrupted by the new American protectionist policies. This particularly applies to those that are related to subsidy programs, local production requirements, and new industrial policies. Measures such as the Inflation Reduction Act have caused some concerns among EU member states about competitive disadvantages. This encouraged debates on whether to implement their own subsidies, pursue negotiated exemptions, or retaliate through trade mechanisms. At the same time, the EU must be aware of and balance defending its economic interests with maintaining strong transatlantic cooperation on global security issues. This makes the EU's response to the new U.S. protectionist policies both complex and extremely diplomatically sensitive.

## **IV. Status Quo**

### **1. Current Situation**

Since early 2025, the United States has sharply escalated protectionist trade policies. This has significantly altered the economic and diplomatic landscape on a global scale. The average

statutory U.S. import tariff rose by approximately 14% between January and September of 2025, bringing it to an estimated 18-20%, which are levels that have not been seen since the Smoot-Hawley era. These new measures are vast in scope, as the WTO estimates that \$2,732.7 billion USD of global merchandise trade was covered by newly implemented tariffs and import measures during a recent 7-month review period. This value is more than triple the \$887.6 billion USD in the prior 12-month period. By mid-2025, the total stockpile of restrictive measures covered \$4,604.1 billion USD in trade, equivalent to 19.4% of world imports, which was up from 12.5% at the end of 2024.

These tariffs have generated substantial revenue, as a study by the Penn Wharton Budget Model estimates that between October 2024 and May 2025, the U.S. raised \$42.7 billion in additional tariff revenue. At the same time, importers avoided roughly \$6.5 billion USD (roughly 13.1%) of these new tariffs by frontloading purchases and shifting sourcing strategies. The macroeconomic impact of the renewed U.S. Protectionist policies is notable as Allianz Trade reports that the average U.S. import tariff rate hit 25.5%, the highest level since 1890. Simulations from economic models suggest that a baseline 10% tariff on all imports could reduce U.S. GDP by 0.7% in a year. A steeper 60% tariff on China could cut GDP by 1.1%, while also pushing U.S. consumer price inflation higher by 0.5-0.8% and raising unemployment by 0.2-0.3%.

Sectoral and diplomatic risks are also rising rapidly as a result of the new policies. For example, critical material imports are being heavily targeted, as in 2023, 70.3% of U.S. imports (by value) of natural graphite came from China. Permanent magnets from China made up nearly 80% of U.S. intake. Another example is U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum from China, which were raised to 25% in August 2024. From a global trade standpoint, the WTO warns of a slowdown and projects a 0.2% contraction in global merchandise trade volume in 2025 due to the escalating U.S. tariff environment, and warns that if the harshest reciprocal tariffs are reinstated, the decline could deepen to 1.5%. Diplomatically, these protectionist measures train traditional alliances between nations. The rapid imposition of broad tariffs challenges trust in multilateral institutions and could weaken the U.S.'s role as a reliable leader in global trade governance. At the same time, many countries are being pushed to reorient their trade, either diversifying away from U.S. markets or increasing economic self-reliance, reconfiguring long-standing interdependencies between global nations.



## **2. Past Actions**

### **UNGA Resolutions on Multilateral Trade and Development**

The General Assembly has continuously emphasised the importance of an open, systematic trading system. Resolutions such as “*Towards a New International Economic Order*” and the ongoing “*International Trade and Development*” agenda have foregrounded the need for regulated and predictable trade environments, especially in response to concerns regarding major economies adopting protective or unilateral policies. Although these past resolutions did not refer to the United States directly, many were drafted during periods of heightened U.S. protectionism and tariff rates. Among them, the 1974 NIEO resolution, “*Towards a New International Economic Order*,” accentuates the disadvantages the developing countries encountered in the global economic structures. Many states voiced concerns that the trade and financial systems were dominated by MDCs that could change trade rules to serve their own domestic political interests.

### **Export Control Reform Act (ECRA) of 2018**

The Export Control Reform Act (ECRA) presented the U.S. government with a greater authority to restrict the export of technologies considered vital to national security, referred to as “emerging and foundational technologies,” especially to its geopolitical competitors. By limiting access to high-end American technology, ECRA has exacerbated the technology access inequality and strained U.S. relations with many countries. Since ECRA can significantly influence the stability of supply chains, accelerate the formation of competing technological blocs, and reshape power dynamics in critical industries, it is frequently referenced in UN debates on economic security, the militarisation of supply chains, and the political weaponization of interdependence and global trade.

### **The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (2022) - Clean Energy Subsidies**

The Inflation Reduction Act provides subsidies and tax credits for clean energy technologies as incentives for domestic production. This incited diplomatic pushback from major U.S. cooperatives, including the EU, South Korea, and Japan, who argued that their domestic companies would be unfairly excluded from the international market competition. Several governments warned that the law could violate WTO rules on non-discrimination, potentially triggering disputes or retaliatory policies. Furthermore, UN bodies such as UNCTAD have noted that the IRA may intensify global competition for green supply chains, in an effort for other states rushing to match U.S. subsidies, eventually increasing the barrier where small economies cannot compete. As the trading system increasingly relies on cross-border technological cooperation, the IRA has become an example of how domestic industrial policy can strain diplomatic relationships as a byproduct. These protectionist policies disproportionately harm developing countries, which rely on exports for economic stability. African and Latin American nations face a higher recession risk if interrupted supply chains limit access to important markets such as the U.S. or China. In the renewable energy sector, smaller economies have higher technology adoption obstacles, restricting their involvement in expanding global markets. Furthermore, increased competition for essential minerals like lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements might exacerbate environmental concerns and spark geopolitical tensions. Addressing these vulnerabilities necessitates international cooperation and coordination, with institutions such as UNCTAD giving recommendations to help these countries efficiently handle economic upheavals.

## **V. Future Outlook**

### **1. Direction of Debate**

#### **Ways to mitigate the negative impacts of U.S. protectionist policies**

Although protectionist measures like the 2025 tariffs are designed to defend domestic businesses and national security, they have the potential to generate economic instability, disrupt supply chains, and strain diplomatic ties. Member states and international organizations can look into ways to offset these effects, such as negotiating temporary exclusions, forming bilateral agreements to lessen tariff pressure, or building regional trade corridors. Countries affected by

tariffs can decrease economic losses, retain critical supply flows, and maintain trust in international partnerships while adhering to US policy objectives.

### **Ways to regulate and enforce fair trade practices among nations**

Creating systems that hold governments accountable for implementing tariffs only for genuine security reasons could help limit abuse and avert escalation. This could include clearer standards within the World Trade Organization (WTO), independent monitoring tools, and dispute resolution processes to maintain transparency. Strict enforcement of such norms, combined with incentives for compliance, can serve to maintain a balance between national security interests and global economic stability. This strategy encourages governments to use protectionist measures responsibly while not harming the overall trade system.

### **Ways to raise awareness and promote dialogue about protectionist policies**

While raising awareness about the consequences of protectionism is important, its impact is limited unless supported with more structural solutions. Beyond promotional procedures, states can pursue innovative mechanisms such as developing multilateral rules for strategic industries, revitalizing the WTO dispute system, or establishing cooperative frameworks for semiconductor and green-technology supply chains. These approaches can help mitigate the underlying drivers of protectionism by creating incentives for collaboration rather than retaliation. Combining public education with institutional reforms and cooperative economic strategies allows countries to move toward a more stable and balanced global trading environment.

## **2. Possible Solutions**

### **Strengthen Multilateral Trade Frameworks**

Beyond the WTO, institutions such as UNCTAD, UNIDO, and the OECD can take on a larger role in developing clearer guidelines for national-security-based tariffs and monitoring the transparency of industrial subsidies. Engaging private-sector actors within these frameworks would also help ensure that these regulations reflect real supply-chain conditions. Expanding these institutions' mandates would help prevent the overuse of protectionist measures.

### **Diversify Supply Chains and Regional Cooperation**

Countries can reduce vulnerability to protectionist shocks by adopting specific diversification strategies, such as investing in nearshoring or friend-shoring partnerships, participating in regional supply-chain agreements, and establishing joint infrastructure projects funded by development banks. Early-warning systems, which would be coordinated through UN agencies or regional blocs, can help governments anticipate trade disruptions and adjust procurement before tariffs escalate. These targeted steps make supply chains more resilient while maintaining constructive diplomatic relationships.

### **Promote Dialogue and Policy Coordination**

Dialogue is most effective when tied to formal mechanisms. Regular coordination through venues like the G20 and ASEAN+3 can facilitate the exchange of information on trade-security risks and allow countries to negotiate exemptions or shared standards. NGOs such as the International Chamber of Commerce can contribute by providing transparency reports and mediating disputes. Collaborative initiatives—such as joint industrial-security research centers or multinational innovation projects—enable states to pursue security objectives without resorting to unilateral protectionism.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. How can countries affected by U.S. tariffs protect their domestic industries without damaging diplomatic relations?
2. What mechanisms can ensure tariffs justified on national security grounds are used responsibly and fairly?
3. How can nations diversify supply chains to reduce vulnerability to sudden tariff changes?
4. In what ways might continued U.S. protectionism affect global alliances and regional trade partnerships?
5. How can international coordination and policy dialogue help mitigate the economic and security impacts of U.S. protectionist measures?
6. What steps can the international community take to prevent protectionist policies from escalating into trade wars?

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