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International Trade Administration: Overview and Issues

The International Trade Administration (ITA), a unit of the U.S. Department of Commerce (Commerce), plays a key role in U.S. trade policy efforts to advance U.S. commercial interests. ITA's stated mission is to strengthen U.S. industry's competitiveness, promote U.S. trade and investment, and ensure foreign trading partners' compliance with U.S. trade rules. ITA has been involved in implementing U.S. policies to boost U.S. industry's competitiveness in strategic sectors such as semiconductors and to protect the U.S. market from unfair trade practices. The 119th Congress could deliberate on issues of ITA's effectiveness, staffing, authorities, and structure as it considers the President's proposed FY2026 budget for ITA (see "Appropriations"). Such issues could also feature in Senate consideration of nominations to ITA positions or in other oversight and legislative activity.

ITA in U.S. Trade Policy

ITA works with numerous federal agencies involved in U.S. trade policy including Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), which regulates trade for national security reasons (e.g., Section 232 and export controls). ITA also works with the Department of State on economic and commercial diplomacy efforts, the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) on market access issues, and the Department of the Treasury on national security reviews of foreign investment, via the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS).

Origins and Leadership

While some of ITA's functions date back to the 1900s under predecessor agencies, the Secretary of Commerce established ITA in 1980, as part of a broader reorganization of federal trade functions. ITA's creation included the transfer of responsibilities to Commerce from the State Department (the responsibility of overseas commercial work), and from the Treasury Department (the administration of antidumping and countervailing duties [AD/CVD] under U.S. trade remedy laws).

The President nominates candidates for several ITA leadership positions that require Senate confirmation. The Under Secretary for International Trade leads ITA. ITA also has an Assistant Secretary of Commerce in each of four roles: Global Markets—who serves concurrently as the Director General of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service (USFCS); Enforcement and Compliance; Industry and Analysis; and Travel and Tourism. The latter position has been vacant since it was established in P.L. 117-328.

Organizational Structure

In 2013, ITA underwent a major internal consolidation that, according to a Commerce press release, aimed to enhance its effectiveness, streamline operations, and save costs. After approval in Congress (H.Rept. 113-171), ITA consolidated its four "business" units into three, and

retained its administrative unit. ITA is currently structured as follows:

Global Markets (GM), the largest ITA unit, provides market research and counseling, business connections, and other services to promote U.S. exports and attract foreign investment to the United States. GM officials engage with foreign counterparts to help U.S. firms address foreign trade barriers. Key GM components include the following:

- **USFCS** aims to promote U.S. exports, particularly by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and protect U.S. business interests abroad (15 U.S.C. §4721). In 2024, ITA reported that USFCS had staff at more than 100 domestic U.S. Export Assistance Centers and at overseas missions in 80 countries "of U.S. commercial significance." Per statute, the Commerce Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of State, is to ensure that USFCS activities are consistent with U.S. foreign policy objectives.
- The **Advocacy Center** aims to support U.S. companies bidding on foreign procurement contracts and projects to ensure fair and open competition against foreign firms.
- **SelectUSA**, established by executive order in 2011, aims to attract business investment into the United States and coordinate federal investment resources.

The **Enforcement & Compliance (E&C)** unit responds to "unfair" foreign trade practices and foreign government-imposed trade barriers by enforcing U.S. laws. E&C conducts AD/CVD investigations. E&C also monitors foreign governments' compliance with obligations under U.S. trade agreements. It conducts technical reviews of requests for product-specific exclusions from U.S. tariffs, such as for imported steel and aluminum. E&C also conveys Commerce's view on trade policy matters, as part of an interagency system, led by USTR, to support trade policy development and coordination (19 U.S.C. §1872).

The **Industry and Analysis (I&A)** unit is responsible for providing industry and sectoral expertise, data, and analysis. I&A has identified risks and opportunities for U.S. industry growth across sectors and has led engagement on supply chains, semiconductors, and critical minerals. It has administered the data privacy framework program to enable firms to transfer personal data from Europe to the United States. I&A also helps administer dispute settlement actions conducted under U.S. free trade agreements. I&A coordinates Commerce's participation in CFIUS, including providing sectoral and supply chain-related analysis of cases. I&A also administers the Industry Trade Advisory Committees (ITACs), a partnership with the private sector co-managed by Commerce and USTR. The ITACs provide advice on a range of U.S. trade negotiations and trade policy issues (19 U.S.C. §2155). In March 2025, the Secretary of Commerce terminated advisory committees on

supply chain competitiveness, civil nuclear trade, and renewable energy export promotion.

The **Executive Direction and Administration (ExAd)** unit provides leadership, strategic planning, and coordination for ITA. It supports the Secretary of Commerce, who chairs the interagency Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee that is charged with coordinating and developing a government-wide export promotion plan (15 U.S.C. §4727).

Appropriations

Congress is deliberating FY2026 appropriations for ITA and broadly, Commerce. Congress has funded ITA via the annual Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations. For FY2025, Congress passed a continuing resolution to fund ITA at FY2024-levels, totaling \$611.0 million in direct appropriations, with an additional \$12.0 million to be collected in user fees for certain services. ITA composes about 6% of Commerce's budget.

In FY2024, over half of ITA's budget funded staffing and related costs for approximately 1,500 full-time equivalents. Other expenses included contributions to the State Department for shared expenses to support the USFCS. ITA's budget, by unit, averaged in the past decade: 65% for GM; 18% for E&C; 11% for I&A; and 5% for ExAd.

For FY2026, the President has proposed reducing ITA's budget by 31% compared to the FY2025 appropriation, and GM's budget by nearly half. The budget request aims to "[refocus] ITA's footprint to align with key geostrategic interests" including countering China, securing access to critical minerals, supporting supply chains, and investing in U.S. jobs. During his first term, President Trump proposed similar budget cuts; congressional appropriators rejected those proposals and funded ITA at levels equal to or more than the previous year (**Figure 1**).

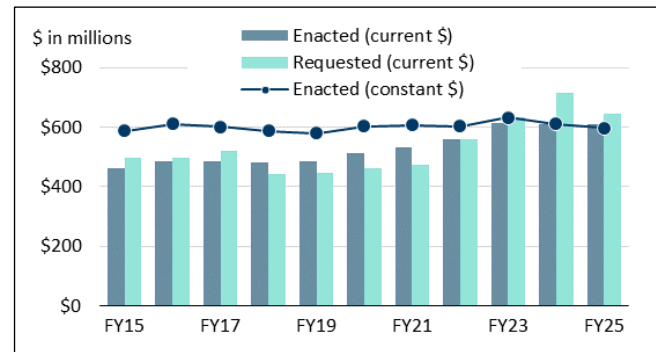
Select Issues for Congress

Effectiveness. As part of Congress' oversight functions and in its FY2026 budget considerations, Congress could examine ITA's effectiveness in implementing its mission and advancing U.S. trade policies including regarding tariffs, supply chain resilience, and industrial development. For example, Congress has held hearings to examine ITA's export promotion programs and efforts to advance U.S. trade policy objectives; and ITA's Office of Inspector General has assessed ITA's activities in helping businesses to resolve foreign trade barriers. Among the areas Congress could examine include how ITA allocates resources and staff for particular responsibilities; how advisory committees provide input into U.S. trade policy and whether their role is adequate and effective; and ITA's reporting to Congress and whether such detail is adequate for Congress to examine its effectiveness.

Appropriations and Congressional Direction. In light of the Administration's proposal to "refocus" ITA and reduce its budget, Congress could assess what the appropriate funding level for ITA should be. Congress also could direct how ITA allocates resources to core activities. For example, the explanatory statement for the FY2024 CJS appropriations (P.L. 118-42) directed ITA to prioritize supporting supply chain resilience in critical sectors and to

expand trade opportunities for rural businesses. Bills in the 119th Congress would direct ITA's SelectUSA to support semiconductor supply chains (H.R. 2480, S. 97).

Figure 1. ITA Requested and Enacted Appropriations FY2015-FY2025



Source: CRS, based on CBJs and annual appropriations legislation.

Notes: Direct appropriations for ITA. "Constant \$" figures are adjusted to FY2024 constant dollars using Office of Management and Budget, Historical Tables, Table 10.1: Gross Domestic Product and Deflators Used in the Historical Tables: 1940-2029.

Interagency Relationships. ITA is one of multiple agencies that aim to advance U.S. trade and commercial policy abroad. The coordination and delineation of roles among these agencies have been of interest to Congress. For example, the explanatory statement to the FY2024 CJS appropriations law directed the USFCS to coordinate with the State Department to ensure its activities align with U.S. foreign policy and presence in regions key to U.S. strategic competition, such as with China. Congress could examine ITA's relationship to the State Department, which has a role in economic and commercial diplomacy, and to USTR, which leads U.S. trade negotiations on behalf of the President, and assess coordination or alignment of roles or adjust their relative authorities.

Reorganization. Congress could consider whether or not to reorganize trade functions across the federal government. ITA emerged from a prior trade reorganization, and has been a focus of past reorganization debates. Some previous bills proposed to consolidate trade functions of ITA and other agencies in a new trade department (e.g., 104th Cong., S. 929, reported with amendment); or transfer the USFCS to the State Department (e.g., 116th Cong., H.R. 7408 and H.R. 7549) or to USTR (e.g., 104th Cong., H.R. 1756). Supporters of ITA reorganization may argue that it would eliminate duplication of functions, better define U.S. goals and priorities, and reduce costs. Critics may argue that subsuming ITA's functions into a larger entity or entities could make trade policy less effective by diluting focus or limiting resources devoted to these functions.

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