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## A Ha Noi Plan of Action for the WTO

by Charles E. Morrison

Vietnam is the newest member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This week it also hosts the leaders of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, arguably the world's most important annual gathering of world leaders. President George W. Bush, Chinese President Hu Jintao, and Japan's new prime minister, Shinzo Abe, are at the table.

The Asia-Pacific economies should not lose the opportunity provided by the first major international meeting following the U.S. Congressional elections to make one last, concerted effort to restart the stalled WTO Doha Development Agenda of trade negotiations.

With Doha comatose, attention, including that within APEC, is being shifted toward various Plan Bs. But no Plan B is as good as Plan A. Some even threaten the basis of the trading system that has been a primary engine of global growth. Leaders need to stay focused on Plan A, which is to move forward with global trade liberalization through WTO sponsored negotiations.

The trade-oriented APEC economies have no real alternative. Since APEC itself has no negotiating mechanism, it must depend on the WTO to achieve liberalization. Vietnam's liberalization, like China's, has taken place through WTO accession negotiation processes.

Can Doha be restarted at this late hour? Only with a lot of work and tremendous concentration and political will. But with billions in potential economic opportunities at stake, it is well worth the effort, and APEC can be the catalyst.

A Hanoi statement without an action plan and deadlines is not enough. The APEC leaders should pledge to each other to make a determined effort, to include the preparation of credible offers from all the members as a challenge to the Europeans, the Indians, and other trade laggards. Japan has not stepped up to the plate on agriculture. China needs to play a role commensurate with its huge stake in the global trading system. The United States also needs to review its positions and update its offers.

As part of a Hanoi Emergency Plan of Action, the leaders should order their trade ministers to make these preparations urgently by a time certain, and invite their EU and other counterparts to make a similar effort. The trade ministers need to be reconvene, maybe again in Ha Noi.

Some will question whether the new Democratic Congress will accept the results of a Doha Round. This is a defeatist approach. It should be remembered that the Congresses of the past, including Democratic-controlled Congresses, have supported of WTO/GATT agreements once reached.

Obviously, though, the American negotiators need to keep the Congress closely involved.

Plan A is a tall order, but with proper imagination, preparation and participants as well as a great deal of political courage and concentration, one can imagine a serious, significant and successful Hanoi Emergency Plan of Action for world trade. Wouldn't that be a spectacular debut for Vietnam as the WTO's newest member and a tremendous achievement for the APEC process!

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