United Kingdom membership would probably be one of the factors working against resumption of the movement toward full union. Should the United Kingdom fail to join the EEC, the British may be expected to investigate other kinds of free trade arrangements in which they could participate, especially with North America. Indeed, several private groups and individuals in England are already exploring an open-ended free trade area for the United Kingdom.[11]

A definitive judgment about the implications of these complex and ambiguous considerations for the U.S. choice between the two approaches to free trade cannot be reached at this time. On the one hand, if the U.S. decision has to be made in conditions of continued uncertainty about whether the United Kingdom could join the EEC and about resumption of the latter's movement toward European union, another round of the multilateral approach would probably be indicated. On the other hand, the failure of one or both of these possibilities in the next few years would argue for resolving the ambiguity in favor of a free trade area approach by the United States.

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE FEASIBILITY OF THE MULTILATERAL APPROACH

Regardless of the foregoing considerations, the United States could well decide to stay with the much more familiar multilateral approach. In that event, it would direct its initiative to shaping and animating a new GATT round to deal with the new agenda of tasks. But, as noted above, multilateral negotiations have in the past been paced, through the "convoy effect," to the speed of the least willing major participant. If this limitation could not be obviated through advance agreement, it might be that one or more of the main participants would prove unwilling or unable to reciprocate for concessions offered by the others. This situation would confront the willing countries with the choices of (1) giving the reluctant nation a "free ride," (2) seeking progress in areas not involving the latter, which might amount to becoming reconciled to accomplishing little, or (3) proceeding themselves to form a free trade arrangement under the GATT rules.[12]

For the United States to consider seriously the latter course would require weighing several crucial questions:

> Would the loss of momentum in failing to move ahead provide an opportunity for the resurgence of protectionist forces?

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[11] Such an arrangement is viewed in England both as an alternative should the United Kingdom fail to join the EEC and as a future development of Atlantic policy if the U.K. application for EEC membership succeeds. These Britons conceive the initial scope of such an arrangement as comprising the United States, Canada, and the EFTA countries, with Australia, New Zeland, and possibly Japan also included. There seems to be less interest in Japanese participation in the United Kingdom than in the United States. The Britons interested in this possibility believe that the EEC would prefer to abstain from participation until the process of internal unification progresses much further. Such a free trade area possibility and its implications are being clarified by the Atlantic Trade Study, a corporate group recently formed to sponsor a series of research projects outlined in footnote 14. At first sight there appear to be some differences between their concept and the free trade area we have described above, but they could well be only matters of emphasis and semantics deriving from the nature of Britain's current "great debate" about its role in the world. The British almost always talk of an "Atlantic free trade area" or a "North Atlantic free trade area." The word "Atlantic" is shunned, however, in the discussion, as well as in the titles, of the two most fully articulated American proposals to date ("A New Trade Strategy for Canada and the United States," op. cit.; and R. Straus, op. cit.) Yet the British studies are explicitly based on the first of these publications.

[12] We reject the feasibility of changing the U.S. MFN commitment to a conditional basis in dealing with other major trading countries for the reasons given in "The Most Favored Nation Principle: An Appraisal of Its Current Validity in World Trade" (Washington, D.C.: Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America, February 1966).