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Foreign Direct Investment in the United States: An Economic Analysis

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Abstract

[Excerpt] Foreign direct investment in the United States declined sharply after 2000, when a record $300 billion was invested in U.S. businesses and real estate. (Note: The United States defines foreign direct investment as the ownership or control, directly or indirectly, by one foreign person [individual, branch, partnership, association, government, etc.] of 10% or more of the voting securities of an incorporated U.S. business enterprise or an equivalent interest in an unincorporated U.S. business enterprise. 15 CFR §806.15 [a][1].) In 2010, according to U.S. Department of Commerce data, foreigners invested $236 billion in U.S. businesses and real estate. Foreign direct investments are highly sought after by many state and local governments that are struggling to create additional jobs in their localities. While some in Congress encourage such investment to offset the perceived negative economic effects of U.S. firms investing abroad, others are concerned about foreign acquisitions of U.S. firms that are considered essential to U.S. national and economic security.

Keywords

foreign investment, acquisitions, economic security, national security, Congress

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Summary

Foreign direct investment in the United States declined sharply after 2000, when a record $300 billion was invested in U.S. businesses and real estate. (Note: The United States defines foreign direct investment as the ownership or control, directly or indirectly, by one foreign person [individual, branch, partnership, association, government, etc.] of 10% or more of the voting securities of an incorporated U.S. business enterprise or an equivalent interest in an unincorporated U.S. business enterprise. 15 CFR §806.15 [a][1].) In 2010, according to U.S. Department of Commerce data, foreigners invested $236 billion in U.S. businesses and real estate. Foreign direct investments are highly sought after by many state and local governments that are struggling to create additional jobs in their localities. While some in Congress encourage such investment to offset the perceived negative economic effects of U.S. firms investing abroad, others are concerned about foreign acquisitions of U.S. firms that are considered essential to U.S. national and economic security.

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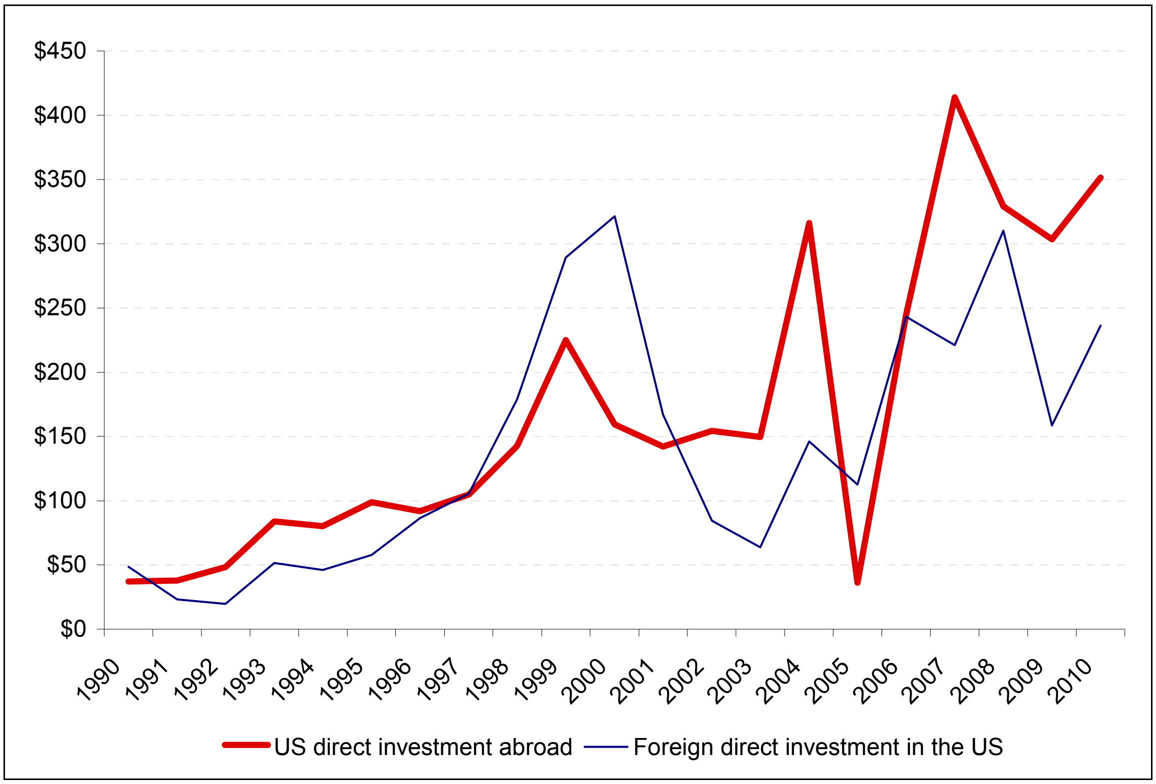
Recent Investments

Foreigners invested $236 billion in nominal terms in U.S. businesses and real estate in 2010, according to data published by the Department of Commerce.[1] As **Figure 1** shows, this represents a 50% increase over the $155 billion invested in 2010. Investments abroad by U.S. parent firms increased by 15% in 2010 to $351 billion, up from the down from the $303 billion they invested abroad in 2009. The increase in foreign direct investment flows mirrors a rebound in global flows following the sharp drop in direct investment flows in 2009 and 2010. According to the United Nations' *World Investment Report*, global foreign direct investment inflows decreased by 38% in 2009 compared with the amount invested in 2008 and rose by 13% in 2010.

Figure 1. Foreign Direct Investment in the United States and U.S. Direct Investment Abroad, Annual Flows, 1990-2010

(in billions of dollars)



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce.

The cumulative amount, or stock, of foreign direct investment in the United States on a historical cost basis[2] rose from $2.1 trillion in 2009 to about $2.3 trillion in 2010. This marked an increase

[1] Scott, Sarah P., U.S. International Transactions: First Quarter 2011. *Survey of Current Business*, July 2011, p. 71. Direct investment data reported in the balance of payments differ from capital flow data reported elsewhere, because the balance of payments data have not been adjusted for current cost adjustments to earnings.

[2] The position, or stock, is the net book value of foreign direct investors' equity in, and outstanding loans to, their affiliates in the United States. A change in the position in a given year consists of three components: equity and intercompany inflows, reinvested earnings of incorporated affiliates, and valuation adjustments to account for changes (continued...)

of 11.0%.[3] The Department of Commerce does not attempt to deflate the annual nominal amounts for direct investment with a specific price deflator. Instead, the department publishes alternative estimates based on current cost and market value to provide other measures of the value of direct investment.

The rise in the value of foreign direct investment includes increases in equity capital and reinvested earnings and a smaller increase in intercompany debt. Equity values increased, although not as much as in 2009, but equity values also experienced smaller increases in values in 2010. Better credit conditions and a slight rise in the rate of growth in the U.S. economy tended to push up such mainstays of foreign direct investment activity as mergers and acquisitions. Foreign direct investments in the U.S. manufacturing sector generally were higher, while investments in the real estate sector were down in 2010 compared with the value in 2009. Data for the first two quarters of 2011 indicate that foreign direct investment in the United States is about 11% lower than the amount recorded in the comparable period in 2010. Such investments may well continue to lag behind similar investment in 2009 in the second half of the year as the rate of economic growth falls.

As a share of the total amount of nonresidential investment spending in the U.S. economy, investment spending by foreign firms was equivalent to 17% in 2010, far above the 11% reached in 2009. Foreign firms' spending was sustained by a large increase in reinvested earnings as U.S. affiliates relied more on their own earnings than on funds borrowed from their foreign parent companies. The U.S. affiliates also improved their investment position by increasing the amount of intercompany debt from their foreign parent company in 2010 compared with 2009. Direct investment was also financed through an increase in equity capital, although the increase in the amount of equity capital was the lowest amount since 2002.

With over $432 billion invested in the United States, the United Kingdom is the largest foreign direct investor, as is indicated in **Table 1**. Japan is the second-largest foreign direct investor in the U.S. economy with about $257.3 billion in investments. Following the Japanese are the Dutch ($217 billion), the Germans ($213 billion), the Canadians ($206 billion), and the French ($185 billion).

In some cases, investments by one or two countries dominate certain industrial sectors, suggesting that there is a rough form of international specialization present in the investment patterns of foreign multinational firms. At year end 2010, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom accounted for the bulk of foreign investments in the U.S. petroleum sector, reflecting investments by two giant companies: Royal Dutch Shell and British Petroleum. Japanese investments in the U.S. wholesale trade sector are also substantial, followed by British investments, and European investors account for the bulk of foreign investments in the retail trade sector. German investors are the largest investors in the information sector as a result of a number of large media company acquisitions. French, German, and British investments dominate other foreign investments in the banking sector, while Dutch, Canadian, British, and French

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(...continued)

in the value of financial assets. The Department of Commerce also publishes data on the foreign direct investment position valued on a current-cost and market value bases. These estimates indicate that in 2010 foreign direct investment increased by $217 billion measured at current cost to a cumulative value of $2.7 trillion, while the market value measure rose by $424 billion in to reach a cumulative value of $3.4 trillion.

[3] Barefoot, Kevin B., and Marilyn Ibarra-Caton, Direct Investment Positions for 2010: Country and Industry Detail, *Survey of Current Business*, July 2011. p. 125.

investments account for over half of the investments in the finance sector. Canada's $90 billion investment in the U.S. banking and finance sectors surpasses the more than $74 billion invested in the finance sector alone by British firms (data for banking have been suppressed by the Department of Commerce), followed by Germany ($52 billion) and France ($29.8 billion). Foreign direct investment in the U.S. manufacturing sector is dominated by a number of countries, each with substantial investments: investments by the United Kingdom ($93.7 billion), Switzerland ($85 billion), the Netherlands ($78 billion), France ($71 billion), Germany ($69 billion), and Japan ($81 billion) account for nearly three-fourths of the total amount of foreign direct investment in this sector.

Investment spending by developed economies accounts for 95% of all foreign direct investment in the United States. These investments are predominately in the manufacturing sector, which accounts for about 32% of foreign direct investment in the United States, a decline from periods when such investment accounted for a majority share of the total. Another 20% of foreign direct investment is in the banking and finance sectors, and 16% is in the retail and wholesale trade sectors, reflecting purchases of department stores and other investments to assist foreign firms in marketing and distributing their products. The fast-growing information sector accounts for 6.7%, while real estate and services account for modest shares of 2.1% and 3.4%, respectively. All other industries account for the remaining 20%.

Table 1. Foreign Direct Investment Position in the United States on a Historical-Cost Basis at Year-End 2010
(in billions of U.S. dollars)

All	All industries	Manufacturing	Wholesale trade	Retail trade	Information	Banking	Finance	Real estate	Services	Other industries
All countries	**$2,342.8**	**$748.3**	**$330.9**	**$40.0**	**$156.5**	**$111.3**	**$356.8**	**$49.1**	**$79.3**	**$470.8**
Canada	206.1	35.7	5.5	3.9	0.9	24.7	65.2	4.1	2.9	63.2
Europe	**1,697.2**	**585.0**	**189.3**	**29.2**	**144.7**	**62.7**	**284.3**	**22.5**	**51.6**	**327.8**
Austria	4.4	2.2	0.4	(D)	(D)	(D)	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
Belgium	43.2	20.7	7.2	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	5.4
France	184.8	71.3	18.8	0.9	19.3	7.3	22.5	0.5	4.6	39.7
Germany	212.9	69.2	16.6	3.3	49.3	10.4	41.6	8.5	0.3	13.7
Ireland	30.6	18.4	(D)	-0.0	(D)	0.4	5.4	0.2	0.0	1.0
Italy	15.7	6.8	1.3	2.0	0.2	(D)	(D)	0.1	0.0	(D)
Luxembourg	181.2	66.0	4.6	(D)	13.9	0.0	42.3	4.1	0.0	43.6
Netherlands	217.1	78.0	24.6	1.8	8.3	(D)	47.8	2.8	0.0	16.4
Sweden	40.8	25.4	10.6	0.0	(D)	0.1	0.1	0.0	(D)	1.0
Switzerland	192.2	85.1	11.8	(D)	11.4	(D)	45.3	0.8	0.3	43.4
UK	432.5	93.7	82.2	(D)	31.6	(D)	73.7	3.5	7.0	114.9
L. America	**60.1**	**15.5**	**6.6**	**1.9**	**1.0**	**4.6**	**-17.9**	**8.8**	**14.6**	**25.0**
Africa	**2.0**	**0.1**	**0.5**	**(D)**	**-0.0**	**0.0**	**-0.0**	**0.1**	**(D)**	**1.3**
Mid. East	**15.4**	**3.5**	**6.0**	**(D)**	**0.8**	**0.0**	**(D)**	**0.5**	**(D)**	**3.8**
Asia	**362.0**	**108.4**	**122.9**	**(D)**	**9.2**	**19.2**	**(D)**	**13.1**	**10.0**	**49.6**
Australia	49.5	5.3	0.1	(D)	(D)	2.3	4.3	5.1	0.0	31.7
Japan	257.3	80.7	104.0	4.3	9.0	13.5	19.3	5.6	7.5	13.3
Korea	15.2	2.5	12.3	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.1
OPEC	11.4	2.0	(D)	(D)	0.0	0.9	(D)	0.0	-0.0	2.9

Source: Barefoot, Kevin B. and Marilyn Ibarra-Caton, Direct Investment Positions for 2010: Country and Industry Detail. *Survey of Current Business*, July 2011. p. 141.

Notes: The position is the stock, or cumulative, book value of foreign direct investors' equity in, and net outstanding loans to, their U.S. affiliates. A negative position may result as U.S. affiliates repay debts to their foreign parents, and as foreign parents borrow funds from their U.S. affiliates. "D" indicates that data have been suppressed by the Department of Commerce to avoid the disclosure of data of individual companies.

Acquisitions and Establishments

Another way of looking at foreign direct investment is by distinguishing between transactions in which foreigners acquire existing U.S. firms and those in which foreigners establish new firms—termed "greenfield" investments. New investments are often preferred at the local level because they are thought to add to local employment, whereas a foreign acquisition itself may add little, if any, new employment. In 2008, outlays for new investments, which include investments made directly by foreign investors and those made by existing U.S. affiliates, were $260 billion, a 3.0% increase over the $252 billion invested in 2007. According to the Department of Commerce, the increase in new investments reflected several large transactions.[4] These transactions include the acquisition of Anheuser-Busch Cos. Inc., by Stichting Interbrew SA for $52 billion; the acquisition of Alcon Inc., by Novartis AG for $10.8 billion; and large investments in Commerce Bancorp, New Jersey, Morgan Stanley, and Citigroup. Acquisitions of existing U.S. firms accounted for 93% of the new investments by value. Investments by the existing U.S. affiliates of foreign firms accounted for 82% of the total transactions by investor, while other foreign direct investors accounted for the remaining 18% of transactions. Investment outlays by foreign firms increased from 2007 to 2008 in all major sectors, except wholesale trade, retail trade, and real estate. Investment in information, manufacturing, and services all posted increases. The Department of Commerce halted publication of the annual report on foreign acquisitions after the June 2008 edition. Instead, it is developing a separate report that it expects will better capture the construction of new plants by foreign-owned firms that are operating in the United States.

Economic Performance

By year-end 2009, the latest year for which detailed data are available, foreign firms employed almost 6 million Americans, less than 4% of the U.S. civilian labor force, and owned over 32,000 individual business establishments.[5] Foreign firms have a direct investment presence in every state. Employment of these firms ranges from over 636,000 in California, to about 7,700 in South Dakota. Following California, New York (473,000), Texas (446,000), Illinois (268,000), Pennsylvania (290,000), Florida (268,000), and New Jersey (264,000) have the largest numbers of residents employed by foreign firms. In 2009, 36% of the foreign firms' employment was in the manufacturing sector, more than twice the share of manufacturing employment in the U.S. economy as a whole, with average annual compensation (wages and benefits) per worker of about $63,000.

Retail and wholesale trade accounted for another 21% of total affiliate employment. Dutch-affiliated firms are the largest single employers in the retail trade sector and account for nearly one-third of total affiliate employment in this sector, while Japanese and German firms account for over half of the employment in the wholesale trade sector. Canadian, French, and Japanese firms account for the largest share of affiliate employment in the services sector, which accounted for about 18% of total affiliate employment. Employment in the information, finance, and real

[4] Anderson, Thomas, Foreign Direct Investment in the United States: New Investment in 2008. *Survey of Current Business*, June 2009. p. 34.

[5] *Foreign Direct Investment in the United States: Operations of U.S. Affiliates of Foreign Companies, Preliminary 2009 Estimates*. Bureau of Economic Analysis, September 2011, Table 1A-1.

estate services sectors accounts for another 13% of total affiliate employment. Average employee compensation is highest in the finance sector—$229,000—where Swiss, Canadian, Japanese, and British firms account for three-fourths of the employment. The rest of the affiliate employment is spread among a large number of other industries.

The affiliates of foreign firms spent $173 billion in the United States in 2009 on new plants and equipment, imported $507 billion in goods and exported $232 billion in goods. Since 1980, the total amount of foreign direct investment in the economy has increased eight-fold and nearly doubled as a share of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) from 3.4% to 6.4%. It is important to note, however, that these data do not imply anything in particular about the role foreign direct investment has played in the rate of growth of U.S. GDP.

The performance of foreign-owned establishments, on average, compared with their U.S.-owned counterparts presents a mixed picture. Historically, foreign-owned firms operating in the United States have had lower rates of return, as measured by return on assets, than U.S.-owned firms, although the gap between the two groups appears to have narrowed over time. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, this narrowing of the gap in the rate of return appears to be related to age effects, or the costs associated with acquiring or establishing a new business that can entail startup costs that disappear over time and market share.[6] By other measures, foreign-owned manufacturing firms appear to be outperforming their U.S. counterparts. [7]Although foreign-owned firms account for less than 3% of all U.S. manufacturing establishments, they have had six times more value added on average and seven times higher value of shipments than other manufacturing establishments. The average plant size for foreign-owned firms is much larger—six times—than for other U.S. firms, on average, in similar industries. This difference in plant size apparently rises from an absence of small plants among those that are foreign-owned. As a result of the larger plant scale and newer plant age, foreign-owned firms paid wages on average that were 60% higher than other U.S. manufacturing firms, had 40% higher productivity per worker, and 58% greater output per worker than the average of comparable U.S.-owned manufacturing plants. Foreign-owned firms also display higher capital intensity in a larger number of industries than all U.S. establishments.

These differences between foreign-owned firms and all U.S. firms should be viewed with some caution. First, the two groups of firms are not strictly comparable: the group of foreign-owned firms comprises a subset of all foreign firms, which includes primarily very large firms; the group of U.S. firms includes all firms, spanning a broader range of sizes. Secondly, the differences reflect a range of additional factors, including the prospect that foreign firms that invest in the United States likely are large firms with proven technologies or techniques they have successfully transferred to the United States. Small foreign ventures, experimenting with unproven technologies, are unlikely to want the added risk of investing overseas. Foreign investors also tend to opt for larger scale and higher capital-intensity plants than the average U.S. firm to offset the risks inherent in investing abroad and to generate higher profits to make it economical to manage an operation far removed from the parent firm.

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[6] Mataloni, Raymond J. Jr., An Examination of the Low Rates of Return of Foreign-Owned U.S. Companies, *Survey of Current Business*, March 2000, p. 55.

[7] *Foreign Direct Investment in the United States, Establishment Data for 2002*, Bureau of Economic Analysis, June 2007.

Conclusions

Foreign direct investment in the United States in 2009 rose slightly over the amount invested in 2008, but set a record in nominal terms for the most amount of foreign direct investment in the economy in a year. Other countries have experienced a similar turnaround in foreign direct investment inflows, especially some of the less developed economies where there is a great potential for investment. As the rate of growth of the U.S. economy improves relative to other advanced economies, interest rates stay low, and the rate of price inflation stays in check, foreign direct investment in the United States likely will continue to increase. Of particular importance will be public concerns over foreign direct investment in the economy as a whole and on the overall phenomenon referred to as "globalization," with its impact on jobs in the economy. Concerns over foreign direct investment, where they exist, stem not so much from the perceived potential losses of international competitiveness that characterized similar concerns in the 1980s, but from potential job losses that could result from mergers and acquisitions, although such losses could occur whether the acquiring company is foreign- or U.S.-owned. Such concerns are offset, at least in part, by the benefits that are perceived to be derived from the inflow of capital and the potential for new jobs being created in local areas.

Although job security is an important public issue, opposition to some types of foreign direct investment stems from concerns about the impact of such investment on U.S. economic and security interests, particularly in light of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The U.S. economy, however, remains a prime destination for foreign direct investment. As the pace of economic growth in the nation increases relative to that of foreign economies, foreign direct investment likely will increase as new investments are attracted to the United States and existing firms are encouraged to reinvest profits in their U.S. operations.

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