

CHAPTER 13

National Income Accounting and the Balance of Payments

Between 2004 and 2007, the world economy boomed, its total real product growing at an annual average rate of about 5 percent per year. The growth rate of world production slowed to around 3 percent per year in 2008, before dropping to *minus* 0.6 percent in 2009—a reduction in world output unprecedented in the period since World War II. These aggregate patterns mask sharp differences among individual countries. Some, such as China, slowed relatively modestly in 2009, while the output of other countries, such as the United States, contracted sharply. Can economic analysis help us to understand the behavior of the global economy and the reasons why individual countries' fortunes often differ?

Previous chapters have been concerned primarily with the problem of making the best use of the world's scarce productive resources at a single point in time. The branch of economics called **microeconomics** studies this problem from the perspective of individual firms and consumers. Microeconomics works “from the bottom up” to show how individual economic actors, by pursuing their own interests, collectively determine how resources are used. In our study of international microeconomics, we have learned how individual production and consumption decisions produce patterns of international trade and specialization. We have also seen that while free trade usually encourages efficient resource use, government intervention or market failures can cause waste even when all factors of production are fully employed.

With this chapter we shift our focus and ask: How can economic policy ensure that factors of production *are* fully employed? And what determines how an economy's capacity to produce goods and services changes over time? To answer these questions, we must understand **macroeconomics**, the branch of economics that studies how economies' overall levels of employment, production, and growth are determined. Like microeconomics, macroeconomics is concerned with the effective use of scarce resources. But while microeconomics focuses on the economic decisions of individuals, macroeconomics analyzes the behavior of an economy as a whole. In our study of international macroeconomics, we will learn how the interactions of national economies influence the worldwide pattern of macroeconomic activity.



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keep track of both changes in a country's indebtedness to foreigners and the fortunes of its export and import-competing industries. The balance of payments accounts also show the connection between foreign transactions and national money supplies.

LEARNING GOALS

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Discuss the concept of the current account balance.
- Use the current account balance to extend national income accounting to open economies.
- Apply national income accounting to the interaction of saving, investment, and net exports.
- Describe the balance of payments accounts and explain their relationship to the current account balance.
- Relate the current account to changes in a country's net foreign wealth.

The National Income Accounts

Of central concern to macroeconomic analysis is a country's **gross national product (GNP)**, the value of all final goods and services produced by the country's factors of production and sold on the market in a given time period. GNP, which is the basic measure of a country's output studied by macroeconomists, is calculated by adding up the market value of all expenditures on final output. GNP therefore includes the value of goods like bread sold in a supermarket and textbooks sold in a bookstore, as well as the value of services provided by stock brokers and plumbers. Because output cannot be produced without the aid of factor inputs, the expenditures that make up GNP are closely linked to the employment of labor, capital, and other factors of production.

To distinguish among the different types of expenditure that make up a country's GNP, government economists and statisticians who compile national income accounts divide GNP among the four possible uses for which a country's final output is purchased: *consumption* (the amount consumed by private domestic residents), *investment* (the amount put aside by private firms to build new plant and equipment for future production), *government purchases* (the amount used by the government), and the *current account balance* (the amount of net exports of goods and services to foreigners). The term *national income accounts*, rather than *national output accounts*, is used to describe this fourfold classification because a country's income in fact equals its output. Thus, the national income accounts can be thought of as classifying each transaction that contributes to national income according to the type of expenditure that gives rise to it. Figure 13-1 shows how U.S. GNP was divided among its four components in 2009.¹

Why is it useful to divide GNP into consumption, investment, government purchases, and the current account? One major reason is that we cannot hope to understand the cause of a particular recession or boom without knowing how the main categories of spending

¹Our definition of the current account is not strictly accurate when a country is a net donor or recipient of foreign gifts. This possibility, along with some others, also complicates our identification of GNP with national income. We describe later in this chapter how the definitions of national income and the current account must be changed in such cases.

The paper and ink purchased by the publishing house to produce the book are *not* counted separately in GNP because their contribution to the value of national output is already included in the book's price. It is to avoid such double counting that we allow only the sale of *final* goods and services to enter into the definition of GNP. Sales of intermediate goods, such as paper and ink purchased by a publisher, are not counted. Notice also that the sale of a used textbook does not enter GNP. Our definition counts only final goods and services that are *produced*, and a used textbook does not qualify: It was counted in GNP at the time it was first sold. Equivalently, the sale of a used textbook does not generate income for any factor of production.

Capital Depreciation and International Transfers

Because we have defined GNP and national income so that they are necessarily equal, their equality is really an identity. Two adjustments to the definition of GNP must be made, however, before the identification of GNP and national income is entirely correct in practice.

1. GNP does not take into account the economic loss due to the tendency of machinery and structures to wear out as they are used. This loss, called *depreciation*, reduces the income of capital owners. To calculate national income over a given period, we must therefore subtract from GNP the depreciation of capital over the period. GNP less depreciation is called *net national product* (NNP).
2. A country's income may include gifts from residents of foreign countries, called *unilateral transfers*. Examples of unilateral transfers of income are pension payments to retired citizens living abroad, reparation payments, and foreign aid such as relief funds donated to drought-stricken nations. For the United States in 2009, the balance of such payments amounted to around $-\$130.2$ billion, representing a 0.9 percent of GNP net transfer to foreigners. Net unilateral transfers are part of a country's income but are not part of its product, and they must be added to NNP in calculations of national income.

National income equals GNP *less* depreciation *plus* net unilateral transfers. The difference between GNP and national income is by no means an insignificant amount, but macroeconomics has little to say about it, and it is of little importance for macroeconomic analysis. Therefore, for the purposes of this text, we usually use the terms *GNP* and *national income* interchangeably, emphasizing the distinction between the two only when it is essential.²

Gross Domestic Product

Most countries other than the United States have long reported **gross domestic product (GDP)** rather than GNP as their primary measure of national economic activity. In 1991 the United States began to follow this practice as well. GDP is supposed to measure the volume of production within a country's borders, whereas GNP equals GDP *plus* net receipts of factor income from the rest of the world. For the U.S., these net receipts are primarily the

²Strictly speaking, government statisticians refer to what we have called "national income" as *national disposable income*. Their official concept of national income omits foreign net unilateral transfers. Once again, however, the difference between national income and national disposable income is usually unimportant for macroeconomic analysis. Unilateral transfers are alternatively referred to as *secondary income payments* to distinguish them from *primary income payments* consisting of cross-border wage and investment income. We will see this terminology below when we study balance of payments accounting.

income domestic residents earn on wealth they hold in other countries less the payments domestic residents make to foreign owners of wealth that is located in the domestic country.

GDP does not correct, as GNP does, for the portion of countries' production carried out using services provided by foreign-owned capital and labor. Consider an example: The earnings of a Spanish factory with British owners are counted in Spain's GDP but are part of Britain's GNP. The services British capital provides in Spain are a service export from Britain, therefore they are added to British GDP in calculating British GNP. At the same time, to figure Spain's GNP, we must subtract from its GDP the corresponding service import from Britain.

As a practical matter, movements in GDP and GNP usually do not differ greatly. We will focus on GNP in this book, however, because GNP tracks national income more closely than GDP does, and national welfare depends more directly on national income than on domestic product.

National Income Accounting for an Open Economy

In this section we extend to the case of an open economy the closed-economy national income accounting framework you may have seen in earlier economics courses. We begin with a discussion of the national income accounts because they highlight the key role of international trade in open-economy macroeconomic theory. Since a closed economy's residents cannot purchase foreign output or sell their own to foreigners, all of national income must be allocated to domestic consumption, investment, or government purchases. In an economy open to international trade, however, the closed-economy version of national income accounting must be modified because some domestic output is exported to foreigners while some domestic income is spent on imported foreign products.

The main lesson of this section is the relationship among national saving, investment, and trade imbalances. We will see that in open economies, saving and investment are not necessarily equal, as they are in a closed economy. This occurs because countries can save in the form of foreign wealth by exporting more than they import, and they can *dissave*—that is, reduce their foreign wealth—by exporting less than they import.

Consumption

The portion of GNP purchased by private households to fulfill current wants is called **consumption**. Purchases of movie tickets, food, dental work, and washing machines all fall into this category. Consumption expenditure is the largest component of GNP in most economies. In the United States, for example, the fraction of GNP devoted to consumption has fluctuated in a range from about 62 to 70 percent over the past 60 years.

Investment

The part of output used by private firms to produce future output is called **investment**. Investment spending may be viewed as the portion of GNP used to increase the nation's stock of capital. Steel and bricks used to build a factory are part of investment spending, as are services provided by a technician who helps build business computers. Firms' purchases of inventories are also counted in investment spending because carrying inventories is just another way for firms to transfer output from current use to future use.

Investment is usually more variable than consumption. In the United States, (gross) investment has fluctuated between 11 and 22 percent of GNP in recent years. We often use the word *investment* to describe individual households' purchases of stocks, bonds, or real estate, but you should be careful not to confuse this everyday meaning of the word with the economic definition of investment as a part of GNP. When you buy a share of Microsoft stock, you are buying neither a good nor a service, so your purchase does not show up in GNP.

you can see how that outcome could have occurred. If the government deficit rises ($G - T$ goes up) and private saving and investment don't change much, the current account surplus must fall by roughly the same amount as the increase in the fiscal deficit. In the United States between 1981 and 1985, the government deficit increased by a bit more than 2 percent of GNP, while $S^p - I$ fell by about half a percent of GNP, so the current account fell from an approximately balanced position to about -3 percent of GNP. (The variables in identity (13-2) are expressed as percentages of GNP for easy comparison.) Thus, the twin deficits prediction is not too far off the mark.

The twin deficits theory can lead us seriously astray, however, when changes in government deficits lead to bigger changes in private saving and investment behavior. A good example of these effects comes from European countries' efforts to cut their government budget deficits prior to the launch of their new common currency, the euro, in January 1999. As we will discuss in Chapter 20, the European Union (EU) had agreed that no member country with a large government deficit would be allowed to adopt the new currency along with the initial wave of euro zone members. As 1999 approached, therefore, EU governments made frantic efforts to cut government spending and raise taxes.

Under the twin deficits theory, we would have expected the EU's current account surplus to increase sharply as a result of the fiscal change. As the table below shows, however, nothing of the sort actually happened. For the EU as a whole, government deficits fell by about 4.5 percent of output, yet the current account surplus remained about the same.

The table reveals the main reason the current account didn't change much: a sharp fall in the private saving rate, which declined by about 4 percent of output, almost as much as the increase in government saving. (Investment rose slightly at the same time.) In this case, the behavior of private savers just about neutralized governments' efforts to raise national saving!

It is difficult to know why this offset occurred, but there are a number of possible explanations. One is based on an economic theory known as the Ricardian equivalence of taxes and government deficits. (The theory is named after the same David Ricardo who discovered the theory of comparative advantage—recall Chapter 3—although he himself did not believe in Ricardian equivalence.) Ricardian equivalence argues that when the government cuts taxes and raises its deficit, consumers anticipate that they will face higher taxes later to pay off the resulting government debt. In anticipation, they raise their own (private) saving to offset the fall in government saving. Conversely, governments that *lower* their deficits through higher taxes (thereby increasing government saving) will induce the private sector to *lower* its own saving. Qualitatively, this is the kind of behavior we saw in Europe in the late 1990s.

European Union (percentage of GNP)

Year	CA	S^p	I	$G - T$
1995	0.6	25.9	19.9	-5.4
1996	1.0	24.6	19.3	-4.3
1997	1.5	23.4	19.4	-2.5
1998	1.0	22.6	20.0	-1.6
1999	0.2	21.8	20.8	-0.8

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *OECD Economic Outlook* 68 (December 2000), annex tables 27, 30, and 52 (with investment calculated as the residual).

payment from the United States to foreigners. Correspondingly, a U.S. sale of assets to foreigners enters the U.S. financial account as a credit. The difference between a country's purchases and sales of foreign assets is called its *financial account balance*, or its *net financial flows*.

3. Certain other activities resulting in transfers of wealth between countries are recorded in the **capital account**. These international asset movements—which are generally very small for the United States—differ from those recorded in the financial account. For the most part they result from nonmarket activities or represent the acquisition or disposal of nonproduced, nonfinancial, and possibly intangible assets (such as copyrights and trademarks). For example, if the U.S. government forgives \$1 billion in debt owed to it by the government of Pakistan, U.S. wealth declines by \$1 billion and a \$1 billion debit is recorded in the U.S. capital account.

You will find the complexities of the balance of payments accounts less confusing if you keep in mind the following simple rule of double-entry bookkeeping: *Every international transaction automatically enters the balance of payments twice, once as a credit and once as a debit*. This principle of balance of payments accounting holds true because every transaction has two sides: If you buy something from a foreigner, you must pay him in some way, and the foreigner must then somehow spend or store your payment.

Examples of Paired Transactions

Some examples will show how the principle of double-entry bookkeeping operates in practice.

1. Imagine you buy an ink-jet fax machine from the Italian company Olivetti and pay for your purchase with a \$1,000 check. Your payment to buy a good (the fax machine) from a foreign resident enters the U.S. current account as a debit. But where is the offsetting balance of payments credit? Olivetti's U.S. salesperson must do something with your check—let's say he deposits it in Olivetti's account at Citibank in New York. In this case, Olivetti has purchased, and Citibank has sold, a U.S. asset—a bank deposit worth \$1,000—and the transaction shows up as a \$1,000 credit in the U.S. financial account. The transaction creates the following two offsetting bookkeeping entries in the U.S. balance of payments:

	Credit	Debit
Fax machine purchase (Current account, U.S. good import)		\$1,000
Sale of bank deposit by Citibank (Financial account, U.S. asset sale)	\$1,000	

2. As another example, suppose that during your travels in France, you pay \$200 for a fine dinner at the Restaurant de l'Escargot d'Or. Lacking cash, you place the charge on your Visa credit card. Your payment, which is a tourist expenditure, will be counted as a service import for the United States, and therefore as a current account debit. Where is the offsetting credit? Your signature on the Visa slip entitles the restaurant to receive \$200 (actually, its local currency equivalent) from First Card, the company that issued your Visa card. It is therefore an asset, a claim on a future payment from First Card. So when you pay for your meal abroad with your credit card, you are selling an asset

In examples 1, 2, and 4 above, current or capital account entries have offsetting counterparts in the financial account, while in example 3, two financial account entries offset each other.

You can understand this identity another way. Recall the relationship linking the current account to international lending and borrowing. Because the sum of the current and capital accounts is the total change in a country's net foreign assets (including, through the capital account, nonmarket asset transfers), that sum necessarily equals the difference between a country's purchases of assets from foreigners and its sales of assets to them—that is, the financial account balance (also called net financial flows).

We now turn to a more detailed description of the balance of payments accounts, using as an example the U.S. accounts for 2009.

The Current Account, Once Again

As you have learned, the current account balance measures a country's net exports of goods and services. Table 13-2 shows that U.S. exports (on the credit side) were \$2,159.0 billion in 2009, while U.S. imports (on the debit side) were \$2,412.5 billion.

TABLE 13-2 U.S. Balance of Payments Accounts for 2009 (billions of dollars)

Current Account	
(1) Exports	2,159.0
Of which:	
Goods	1,068.5
Services	502.3
Income receipts (primary income)	588.2
(2) Imports	2,412.5
Of which:	
Goods	1,575.4
Services	370.3
Income payments (primary income)	466.8
(3) Net unilateral transfers (secondary income)	-124.9
Balance on current account	-378.4
[(1) + (2) + (3)]	
Capital Account	
(4)	-0.1
Financial Account	
(5) Net U.S. acquisition of financial assets, excluding financial derivatives	140.5
Of which:	
Official reserve assets	52.3
Other assets	88.2
(6) Net U.S. incurrence of liabilities, excluding financial derivatives	305.7
Of which:	
Official reserve assets	450.0
Other assets	-144.3
(7) Financial derivatives, net	-50.8
Net financial flows	-216.0
[(5) - (6) + (7)]	
Net errors and omissions	162.5
[Net financial flows less sum of current and capital accounts]	

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, June 17, 2010, release. Totals may differ from sums because of rounding.

The balance of payments accounts divide exports and imports into three finer categories. The first is *goods* trade, that is, exports or imports of merchandise. The second category, *services*, includes items such as payments for legal assistance, tourists' expenditures, and shipping fees. The final category, *income*, is made up mostly of international interest and dividend payments and the earnings of domestically owned firms operating abroad. If you own a share of a German firm's stock and receive a dividend payment of \$5, that payment shows up in the accounts as a U.S. investment income receipt of \$5. Wages that workers earn abroad can also enter the income account.

We include income on foreign investments in the current account because that income really is compensation for the *services* provided by foreign investments. This idea, as we saw earlier, is behind the distinction between GNP and GDP. When a U.S. corporation builds a plant in Canada, for instance, the productive services the plant generates are viewed as a service export from the United States to Canada equal in value to the profits the plant yields for its American owner. To be consistent, we must be sure to include these profits in American GNP and not in Canadian GNP. Remember, the definition of GNP refers to goods and services generated by a country's factors of production, but it does *not* specify that those factors must work within the borders of the country that owns them.

Before calculating the current account, we must include one additional type of international transaction that we have largely ignored until now. In discussing the relationship between GNP and national income, we defined unilateral transfers between countries as international gifts, that is, payments that do not correspond to the purchase of any good, service, or asset. Net unilateral transfers are considered part of the current account as well as a part of national income, and the identity $Y = C + I + G + CA$ holds exactly if Y is interpreted as GNP *plus* net transfers. In 2009, the U.S. balance of unilateral transfers was $-\$124.9$ billion.

The table shows a 2009 current account balance of $\$2,159.0$ billion $-\$2,412.5$ billion $-\$124.9$ billion $= -\$378.4$ billion, a deficit. The negative sign means that current payments to foreigners exceeded current receipts and that U.S. residents used more output than they produced. Since these current account transactions were paid for in some way, we know that this $\$378.4$ billion net debit entry must be offset by a net $\$378.4$ billion credit elsewhere in the balance of payments.

The Capital Account

The capital account entry in Table 13-2 shows that in 2009, the United States paid out net capital asset transfers of roughly $\$0.1$ billion. These payments by the United States are a net balance of payments debit. After we add them to the payments deficit implied by the current account, we find that the United States' need to cover its excess payments to foreigners is raised very slightly, from $\$378.4$ billion to $\$378.5$ billion. Because an excess of national spending over income must be covered by net borrowing from foreigners, this negative current plus capital account balance must be matched by an equal negative balance of net financial flows, representing the net liabilities the United States incurred to foreigners in 2009 in order to fund its deficit.

The Financial Account

While the current account is the difference between sales of goods and services to foreigners and purchases of goods and services from them, the financial account measures the difference between acquisitions of assets from foreigners and the buildup of liabilities to them. When the United States borrows $\$1$ from foreigners, it is selling them an asset—a promise that they will be repaid $\$1$, with interest, in the future. Likewise, when the United States lends abroad, it acquires an asset: the right to claim future repayment from foreigners.

To cover its 2009 current plus capital account deficit of \$378.5 billion, the United States needed to borrow from foreigners (or otherwise sell assets to them) in the net amount of \$378.5 billion. We can look again at Table 13-2 to see exactly how this net sale of assets to foreigners came about.

The table records separately U.S. acquisitions of foreign financial assets (which are balance of payments debits, because the United States must pay foreigners for those assets) and increases in foreign claims on residents of the United States (which are balance of payments credits, because the United States receives payments when it sells assets overseas).

These data on increases in U.S. asset holdings abroad and foreign holdings of U.S. assets do not include holdings of *financial derivatives*, which are a class of assets that are more complicated than ordinary stocks and bonds, but have values that can depend on stock and bond values. (We will describe some specific derivative securities in the next chapter.) Starting in 2006, the U.S. Department of Commerce was able to assemble data on *net* cross-border derivative flows for the United States (U.S. net purchases of foreign-issued derivatives less foreign net purchases of U.S.-issued derivatives). Derivatives transactions enter the balance of payments accounts in the same way as do other international asset transactions.

According to Table 13-2, U.S.-owned assets abroad (other than derivatives) increased (on a net basis) by \$140.5 billion in 2009. The figure is “on a net basis” because some U.S. residents bought foreign assets while others sold foreign assets they already owned, the difference between U.S. gross purchases and sales of foreign assets being \$140.5 billion. In the same year (again on a net basis), the United States incurred new liabilities to foreigners equal to \$305.7 billion. Some U.S. residents undoubtedly repaid foreign debts, but new borrowing from foreigners exceeded these repayments by \$305.7 billion. The balance of U.S. sales and purchases of financial derivatives was $-\$50.8$ billion: The United States sold more derivative claims to foreigners than it acquired. We calculate the balance on financial account (net financial flows) as $\$140.5 \text{ billion} - \$305.7 \text{ billion} - \$50.8 \text{ billion} = -\216.0 billion . The negative value for net financial flows means that in 2009, the United States increased its net liability to foreigners (liabilities minus assets) by \$216.0 billion.

Net Errors and Omissions

We come out with net financial flows of $-\$216.0$ billion rather than the $-\$378.5$ billion that we’d expected. According to our data on trade and financial flows, the United States found less financing abroad than it needed to fund its current plus capital account deficit. If every balance of payments credit automatically generates an equal counterpart debit and vice versa, how is this difference possible? The reason is that information about the offsetting debit and credit items associated with a given transaction may be collected from different sources. For example, the import debit that a shipment of DVD players from Japan generates may come from a U.S. customs inspector’s report and the corresponding financial account credit from a report by the U.S. bank in which the check paying for the DVD players is deposited. Because data from different sources may differ in coverage, accuracy, and timing, the balance of payments accounts seldom balance in practice as they must in theory. Account keepers force the two sides to balance by adding to the accounts a *net errors and omissions* item. For 2009, unrecorded (or misrecorded) international transactions generated a balancing accounting credit of \$162.5 billion—the difference between the recorded net financial flows and the sum of the recorded current and capital accounts.

We have no way of knowing exactly how to allocate this discrepancy among the current, capital, and financial accounts. (If we did, it wouldn’t be a discrepancy!) The financial

account is the most likely culprit, since it is notoriously difficult to keep track of the complicated financial trades between residents of different countries. But we cannot conclude that net financial flows were \$162.5 billion lower than recorded, because the current account is also highly suspect. Balance of payments accountants consider merchandise trade data relatively reliable, but data on services are not. Service transactions such as sales of financial advice and computer programming assistance may escape detection. Accurate measurement of international interest and dividend receipts is particularly difficult.

Official Reserve Transactions

Although there are many types of financial account transactions, one type is important enough to merit separate discussion. This type of transaction is the purchase or sale of official reserve assets by central banks.

An economy's **central bank** is the institution responsible for managing the supply of money. In the United States, the central bank is the Federal Reserve System. **Official international reserves** are foreign assets held by central banks as a cushion against national economic misfortune. At one time, official reserves consisted largely of gold, but today, central banks' reserves include substantial foreign financial assets, particularly U.S. dollar assets such as Treasury bills. The Federal Reserve itself holds only a small level of official reserve assets other than gold; its own holdings of U.S. dollar assets are not considered international reserves.

Central banks often buy or sell international reserves in private asset markets to affect macroeconomic conditions in their economies. Official transactions of this type are called **official foreign exchange intervention**. One reason why foreign exchange intervention can alter macroeconomic conditions is that it is a way for the central bank to inject money into the economy or withdraw it from circulation. We will have much more to say later about the causes and consequences of foreign exchange intervention.

Government agencies other than central banks may hold foreign reserves and intervene officially in exchange markets. The U.S. Treasury, for example, operates an Exchange Stabilization Fund that at times has played an active role in market trading. Because the operations of such agencies usually have no noticeable impact on the money supply, however, we will simplify our discussion by speaking (when it is not too misleading) as if the central bank alone holds foreign reserves and intervenes.

When a central bank purchases or sells a foreign asset, the transaction appears in its country's financial account just as if the same transaction had been carried out by a private citizen. A transaction in which the central bank of Japan (the Bank of Japan) acquires dollar assets might occur as follows: A U.S. auto dealer imports a Nissan sedan from Japan and pays the auto company with a check for \$20,000. Nissan does not want to invest the money in dollar assets, but it so happens that the Bank of Japan is willing to give Nissan Japanese money in exchange for the \$20,000 check. The Bank of Japan's international reserves rise by \$20,000 as a result of the deal. Because the Bank of Japan's dollar reserves are part of total Japanese assets held in the United States, the latter rise by \$20,000. This transaction therefore results in a \$20,000 credit in the U.S. financial account, the other side of the \$20,000 debit in the U.S. current account due to the import of the car.¹⁰

Table 13-2 shows the size and direction of official reserve transactions involving the United States in 2009. U.S. official reserve assets—that is, international reserves held by the Federal Reserve—rose by \$52.3 billion. Foreign central banks purchased \$450.0 billion to add to their reserves. The net increase in U.S. official reserves *less* the increase in foreign

¹⁰To test your understanding, see if you can explain why the same sequence of actions causes a \$20,000 improvement in Japan's current account and a \$20,000 increase in its net financial flows.

official reserve claims on the United States is the level of net central bank financial flows, which stood at $\$52.3 - \$450.0 \text{ billion} = -\397.7 billion in 2009.

You can think of this $-\$397.7 \text{ billion}$ net central bank financial flow as measuring the degree to which monetary authorities in the United States and abroad joined with other lenders to cover the U.S. current account deficit. In the example above, the Bank of Japan, by acquiring a $\$20,000$ U.S. bank deposit, indirectly finances an American import of a $\$20,000$ Japanese car. The level of net central bank financial flows is called the **official settlements balance** or (in less formal usage) the **balance of payments**. This balance is the sum of the current account and capital account balances, less the nonreserve portion of the financial account balance, and it indicates the payments gap that official reserve transactions need to cover. Thus the U.S. balance of payments in 2009 was $-\$397.7 \text{ billion}$.

The balance of payments played an important historical role as a measure of disequilibrium in international payments, and for many countries it still plays this role. A negative balance of payments (a deficit) may signal a crisis, for it means that a country is running down its international reserve assets or incurring debts to foreign monetary authorities. If a country faces the risk of being suddenly cut off from foreign loans, it will want to maintain a “war chest” of international reserves as a precaution. Developing countries, in particular, are in this position (see Chapter 22).

Like any summary measure, however, the balance of payments must be interpreted with caution. To return to our running example, the Bank of Japan’s decision to expand its U.S. bank deposit holdings by $\$20,000$ swells the measured U.S. balance of payments deficit by the same amount. Suppose the Bank of Japan instead places its $\$20,000$ with Barclays Bank in London, which in turn deposits the money with Citibank in New York. The United States incurs an extra $\$20,000$ in liabilities to *private* foreigners in this case, and the U.S. balance of payments deficit does not rise. But this “improvement” in the balance of payments is of little economic importance: It makes no real difference to the United States whether it borrows the Bank of Japan’s money directly or through a London bank.



Case Study

The Assets and Liabilities of the World’s Biggest Debtor

We saw earlier that the current account balance measures the flow of new net claims on foreign wealth that a country acquires by exporting more goods and services than it imports. This flow is not, however, the only important factor that causes a country’s net foreign wealth to change. In addition, changes in the market price of wealth previously acquired can alter a country’s net foreign wealth. When Japan’s stock market lost three-quarters of its value over the 1990s, for example, American and European owners of Japanese shares saw the value of their claims on Japan plummet, and Japan’s net *foreign* wealth increased as a result. Exchange rate changes have a similar effect. When the dollar depreciates against foreign currencies, for example, foreigners who hold dollar assets see their wealth fall when measured in their home currencies.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce, which oversees the vast job of data collection behind the U.S. national income and balance of payments statistics, reports annual estimates of the net “international investment position” of the United States—the country’s foreign assets less its foreign liabilities. Because asset price and exchange rate changes alter the dollar values of foreign assets and liabilities alike, the BEA must adjust the values of existing claims to reflect such capital gains and losses in order to estimate U.S. net foreign wealth. These estimates

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show that at the end of 2009, the United States had a *negative* net foreign wealth position far greater than that of any other country.

Until 1991, foreign direct investments such as foreign factories owned by U.S. corporations were valued at their historical, that is, original, purchase prices. Now the BEA uses two different methods to place current values on foreign direct investments: the *current cost* method, which values direct investments at the cost of buying them today, and the *market value* method, which is meant to measure the price at which the investments could be sold. These methods can lead to different valuations because the cost of replacing a particular direct investment and the price it would command if sold on the market may be hard to measure. (The net foreign wealth data graphed in Figure 13-2 are current cost estimates.)

Table 13-3 reproduces the BEA's account of how it made its valuation adjustments to find the U.S. net foreign position at the end of 2009. This "headline" estimate values

TABLE 13-3 International Investment Position of the United States at Year End, 2008 and 2009 (millions of dollars)

Line	Type of Investment	Position, 2008 ¹	Changes in position in 2009				Position, 2009 ²
			Attributable to:				
			Financial flows (a)	Valuation adjustments			
Price changes (b)	Exchange-rate changes ³ (c)	Other changes ⁴ (d)					
1	Net international investment position of the United States (lines 2+3)	-3,493,882	-216,075	522,929	276,730	172,452	-2,737,846
2	Financial derivatives, net (line 5 less line 25) ⁵	159,635	-50,804	(9)	19,103	19,103	127,934
3	Net international investment position, excluding financial derivatives (line 6 less line 26)	-3,653,517	-165,271	522,929	276,730	153,349	-2,865,780
4	U.S.-owned assets abroad (lines 5+6)	19,244,875	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)	-865,791
5	Financial derivatives (gross positive fair value)	6,127,450	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)	-2,615,443
6	U.S.-owned assets abroad, excluding financial derivatives (lines 7+12+17)	13,117,425	140,465	1,066,119	357,956	185,112	14,867,077
7	U.S. official reserve assets	293,732	52,256	56,941	875	0	403,804
8	Gold	227,439	0	56,941	0	0	284,380
9	Special drawing rights	9,340	48,230	0	244	0	57,814
10	Reserve position in the International Monetary Fund	7,683	3,357	0	345	0	11,385
11	Foreign currencies	49,270	699	0	286	0	50,225
12	U.S. government assets, other than official reserve assets	624,100	-541,342	(9)	(9)	17	82,775
13	U.S. credits and other long-term assets ⁶	69,877	1,936	(9)	(9)	17	71,930
14	Repayable in dollars	69,804	1,936	(9)	(9)	17	71,557
15	Other ⁷	273	0	(9)	(9)	0	273
16	U.S. foreign currency holdings and U.S. short-term assets ⁸	554,222	-543,278	(9)	(9)	-543,278	10,944
17	U.S. private assets	12,199,593	629,552	1,009,178	357,081	185,095	14,380,499
18	Direct investment at current cost	3,742,835	268,680	-12,201	79,124	-27,247	4,051,191
19	Foreign securities	3,985,712	208,213	1,021,379	255,694	0	5,470,998
20	Bonds	1,237,284	144,909	84,123	27,269	0	1,493,585
21	Corporate stocks	2,748,428	63,304	937,256	228,425	0	3,977,413
22	U.S. claims on unaffiliated foreigners reported by U.S. nonbanking concerns	794,689	-124,428	0	8,404	115,550	794,225
23	U.S. claims reported by U.S. banks and securities brokers, not included elsewhere	3,676,347	277,087	0	13,859	96,792	4,064,085
24	Foreign-owned assets in the United States (lines 25+26)	22,738,757	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)	-1,621,827
25	Financial derivatives (gross negative fair value)	5,967,815	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)	-2,583,742
26	Foreign-owned assets in the United States, excluding financial derivatives (lines 27+34)	16,770,942	305,736	543,190	81,226	31,763	17,732,857
27	Foreign official assets in the United States	3,939,998	450,030	-13,584	219	-2,824	4,373,839
28	U.S. Government securities	3,284,139	441,056	-104,274	0	-8,524	3,592,397
29	U.S. Treasury securities	2,400,516	561,125	-92,297	0	1,708	2,871,052
30	Other	863,623	-120,069	-11,977	0	-10,232	721,345
31	Other U.S. Government liabilities ⁹	40,577	57,971	0	219	0	98,767
32	U.S. liabilities reported by U.S. banks and securities brokers, not included elsewhere	252,698	-70,851	0	0	5,700	187,457
33	Other foreign official assets	382,674	21,854	90,690	0	0	495,218
34	Other foreign assets	12,830,944	-144,294	556,774	81,007	34,587	13,359,018
35	Direct investment at current cost	2,521,353	134,707	-5,761	3,560	18,927	2,672,786
36	U.S. Treasury securities	850,921	22,781	-47,510	0	0	826,192
37	U.S. securities other than U.S. Treasury securities	4,620,798	59	610,045	56,261	0	5,287,163
38	Corporate and other bonds	2,770,606	-136,296	150,665	56,261	0	3,040,236
39	Corporate stocks	1,850,192	136,355	459,380	0	0	2,445,927
40	U.S. currency	301,159	12,632	0	0	0	313,771
41	U.S. liabilities to unaffiliated foreigners reported by U.S. nonbanking concerns	731,539	-1,460	0	4,638	-69,240	665,477
42	U.S. liabilities reported by U.S. banks and securities brokers, not included elsewhere	3,805,194	-313,013	0	16,548	84,900	3,593,629
43	Memoranda:						
43	Direct investment abroad at market value	3,103,704	268,680	737,062	194,222	-817	4,302,851
44	Direct investment in the United States at market value	2,552,572	134,707	422,683	0	10,621	3,120,583

p Preliminary

r Revised

* Less than \$500,000 (+/-)

--- Not applicable

1. Represents gains or losses on foreign-currency-denominated assets and liabilities due to their revaluation at current exchange rates.

2. Includes changes in coverage due to year-to-year changes in the composition of reporting panels, primarily for bank and nonbank estimates, and to the incorporation of survey results. Also includes capital gains and losses of direct investment affiliates and changes in positions that cannot be allocated to financial flows, price changes, or exchange-rate changes.

3. Financial flows and valuation adjustments for financial derivatives are available only on a net basis, which is shown on line 2; they are not separately available for gross positive fair values and gross negative fair values of financial derivatives. Consequently, columns (a) through (d) on lines 4, 5, and 24, 25 are not available.

4. Data are not separately available for the three types of valuation adjustments; therefore, the sum of all three types is shown in column (d).

5. Reflects changes in the value of the official gold stock due to fluctuations in the market price of gold.

6. Reflects changes in gold stock from U.S. Treasury sales of gold medallions and commemorative and bullion coins; also reflects replenishment through open market purchases. These demonetizations/monetizations are not included in international transactions financial flows.

7. Also includes paid-in capital subscriptions to international financial institutions and outstanding amounts of miscellaneous claims that have been settled through international agreements to be payable to the U.S. government over periods in excess of 1 year. Excludes World War I debts that are not being serviced.

8. Includes indebtedness that the borrower may contractually, or at its option, repay with its currency, with a third country's currency, or by delivery of materials or transfer of services.

9. Includes foreign-currency-denominated assets obtained through temporary reciprocal currency arrangements between the Federal Reserve System and foreign central banks. These assets are included in the investment position at the dollar value established at the time they were received, reflecting the valuation of these assets in the Federal Reserve System's balance sheet. The movement of exchange rates does not affect this valuation.

10. Includes U.S. government liabilities associated with military sales contracts and U.S. government reserve-related liabilities from allocations of special drawing rights (SDRs).

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Survey of Current Business*, July 2010.

direct investments at current cost. Starting with its estimate of 2008 net foreign wealth ($-\$3,493.9$ billion at current cost), the BEA (column a) added the amount of the 2009 U.S. net financial flow of $-\$216$ billion—recall the figure reported in Table 13-2. Then the BEA adjusted the values of previously held assets and liabilities for various changes in their dollar prices (columns b, c, and d). As a result of these valuation changes, U.S. net foreign wealth fell by an amount much smaller than the $\$216$ billion in new net borrowing from foreigners—in fact, U.S. net foreign wealth actually rose, as shown in Figure 13-2! Based on the current cost method for valuing direct investments, the BEA's 2009 estimate of U.S. net foreign wealth was $-\$2,737.8$ billion.

This debt is larger than the total foreign debt owed by all the Central and Eastern European countries, which was about $\$1,100$ billion in 2009. To put these figures in perspective, however, it is important to realize that the U.S. net foreign debt amounted to just under 20 percent of its GDP, while the foreign liability of Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the other Central and Eastern European debtors was nearly 70 percent of their collective GDP! Thus, the U.S. external debt represents a much lower domestic income drain.

Changes in exchange rates and securities prices have the potential to change the U.S. net foreign debt sharply, however, because the *gross* foreign assets and liabilities of the United States have become so large in recent years. Figure 13-3 illustrates this dramatic trend. In 1976, U.S. foreign assets stood at only 25 percent of U.S. GDP and liabilities at 16 percent (making the United States a net foreign creditor in the amount of roughly 9 percent of its GDP). In 2009, however, the country's foreign assets amounted to 129 percent of GDP and its liabilities to 148 percent. The tremendous growth in these

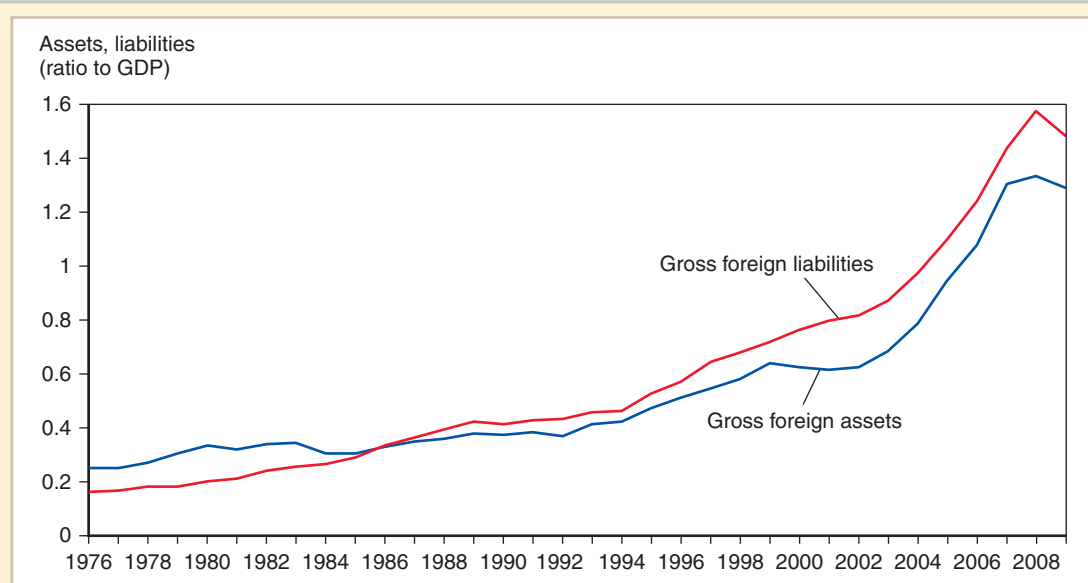


Figure 13-3
U.S. Gross Foreign Assets and Liabilities, 1976–2009

Note: Since 1976, both the foreign assets and the liabilities of the United States have increased sharply. But liabilities have risen more quickly, leaving the United States with a substantial net foreign debt.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, June 2010.

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- c. The Korean government carries out an official foreign exchange intervention in which it uses dollars held in an American bank to buy Korean currency from its citizens.
 - d. A tourist from Detroit buys a meal at an expensive restaurant in Lyons, France, paying with a traveler's check.
 - e. A California winemaker contributes a case of cabernet sauvignon for a London wine tasting.
 - f. A U.S.-owned factory in Britain uses local earnings to buy additional machinery.
4. A New Yorker travels to New Jersey to buy a \$100 telephone answering machine. The New Jersey company that sells the machine then deposits the \$100 check in its account at a New York bank. How would these transactions show up in the balance of payments accounts of New York and New Jersey? What if the New Yorker pays cash for the machine?
5. The nation of Pecunia had a current account deficit of \$1 billion and a nonreserve financial account surplus of \$500 million in 2008.
 - a. What was the balance of payments of Pecunia in that year? What happened to the country's net foreign assets?
 - b. Assume that foreign central banks neither buy nor sell Pecunian assets. How did the Pecunian central bank's foreign reserves change in 2008? How would this official intervention show up in the balance of payments accounts of Pecunia?
 - c. How would your answer to (b) change if you learned that foreign central banks had purchased \$600 million of Pecunian assets in 2008? How would these official purchases enter foreign balance of payments accounts?
 - d. Draw up the Pecunian balance of payments accounts for 2008 under the assumption that the event described in (c) occurred in that year.
6. Can you think of reasons why a government might be concerned about a large current account deficit or surplus? Why might a government be concerned about its official settlements balance (that is, its balance of payments)?
7. Do data on the U.S. official settlements balance give an accurate picture of the extent to which foreign central banks buy and sell dollars in currency markets?
8. Is it possible for a country to have a current account deficit at the same time it has a surplus in its balance of payments? Explain your answer, using hypothetical figures for the current and nonreserve financial accounts. Be sure to discuss the possible implications for official international reserve flows.
9. Suppose that the U.S. net foreign debt is 25 percent of U.S. GDP and that foreign assets and liabilities alike pay an interest rate of 5 percent per year. What would be the drain on U.S. GDP (as a percentage) from paying interest on the net foreign debt? Do you think this is a large number? What if the net foreign debt were 100 percent of GDP? At what point do you think a country's government should become worried about the size of its foreign debt?
10. If you go to the BEA website (<http://www.bea.gov>) and look at the *Survey of Current Business* for July 2010, the table on "U.S. International Transactions," you will find that in 2009, U.S. income receipts on its foreign assets were \$585.2 billion (line 13), while the country's payments on liabilities to foreigners were \$456.0 billion (line 30). Yet we saw in this chapter that the United States is a substantial net debtor to foreigners. How, then, is it possible that the United States received more foreign asset income than it paid out?
11. Return to the example in this chapter's final Case Study of how a 10 percent dollar depreciation affects U.S. net foreign wealth (page 316). Show the size of the effect on *foreigners'* net foreign wealth measured in dollars (as a percent of U.S. GDP).
12. We mentioned in the chapter that capital gains and losses on a country's net foreign assets are not included in the national income measure of the current account. How

- would economic statisticians have to modify the national income identity (13-1) if they wish to include such gains and losses as part of the definition of the current account? In your opinion, would this make sense? Why do you think this is not done in practice?
13. Using the data in the “Memoranda” to Table 13-3, calculate the U.S. 2009 net international investment position with direct investments valued at market prices.

FURTHER READINGS

- European Commission, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, United Nations, and World Bank. *System of National Accounts 2008*. New York: United Nations, 2009. Definitive guidelines for constructing national income and product accounts.
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- Cédric Tille. “The Impact of Exchange Rate Movements on U.S. Foreign Debt.” *Current Issues in Economics and Finance* (Federal Reserve Bank of New York) 9 (January 2003), pp. 1–7. Discusses the implications of asset price changes for U.S. foreign assets and liabilities.



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