

EDITORIAL

Editorial

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For decades, we have seen a steady decline in tariff barriers, with traders and consumers benefitting from simplified cross-border commerce and reduced costs. The proliferation of free trade agreements and multilateral tariff reductions under the World Trade Organization (WTO) served to create a relatively predictable trading environment, encouraging investment in global supply chains and just-in-time logistics.

Customs, in turn, has increasingly shifted its focus away from revenue collection and turned its attention to trade facilitation and community protection measures such as biosecurity, safety and security requirements. This evolution supported the broader move towards streamlined clearance processes, reflecting the assumption that tariff protection was gradually becoming less central to global trade policy.

The recent reversal in tariff trends has disrupted this equilibrium. Traders now face renewed uncertainty, with sudden tariff hikes affecting sourcing decisions, contract pricing and supply chain resilience. Customs authorities, meanwhile, are being pulled back into their more traditional role as revenue collectors and enforcers of shifting tariff regimes, often with little notice. This complicates operational planning, increases the compliance burden, and heightens the risk of disputes at the border.

For both regulators and the international trading community, the return of tariff volatility means re-introducing complexity into processes that had been progressively streamlined – diverting resources from trade facilitation and modernisation towards managing the unpredictable politics of tariff wars.

The escalating complexity of the United States (US) tariff landscape is such that traders are struggling to interpret and comply with regulatory requirements, often opting to apply the highest duty rates to avoid potential non-compliance. Further, with regulatory requirements changing faster than

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systems can be updated, clearance delays are common. As a result, businesses are delaying purchases and deferring imports by stockpiling in US bonded and foreign trade zone facilities in the hope that conditions will improve.

Weaponising tariffs for geopolitical reasons is not only straining diplomatic relations; it is undermining established trade agreements, disrupting global supply chains, fostering business unpredictability, increasing compliance costs and contributing to higher costs for consumers.

If tariffs remain weapons of politics rather than tools of policy, the real cost will be borne by the global trading community – and ultimately, by consumers at every checkout.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank our reviewers¹ for their invaluable contributions to the *World Customs Journal* in 2025. Your dedication, expertise and thoughtful feedback are critical to upholding the quality and integrity of our publication. We deeply appreciate your commitment to academic excellence and global knowledge sharing.

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¹ Achim Rogmann, Albert Veenstra, Bryce Blegen, Carsten Weerth, Cristano Morini, Danilo Desiderio, Edward Kafeero, Fabrizio Vismara, Hong Thi Khanh Nguyen, Hüseyin Yaren, Jisoo Yi, Leonardo Macedo, Mark Harrison, Momchil Antov, Rizwan Mahmood, Rob Preece, Sangeeta Mohanty, Tânia Carvalhais Pereira, Thi Thu Hien Phan, Wes Czyzowicz.