

UNITED STATES COURT OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE

BROTHERS INTERNATIONAL FOOD CORP.,

Plaintiff,

v.

Court No. 20-01024

UNITED STATES;
OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE
REPRESENTATIVE; ROBERT E. LIGHTHIZER, U.S.
TRADE REPRESENTATIVE; U.S. CUSTOMS &
BORDER PROTECTION; MARK A. MORGAN, U.S.
CUSTOMS & BORDER PROTECTION ACTING
COMMISSIONER,

Defendants.

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, Brothers International Food Corp. (hereinafter “Plaintiff”), by its undersigned attorneys, alleges the following:

1. This action concerns Defendants’ unlawful imposition of *ad valorem* tariffs on goods, imported by plaintiff, from the Peoples Republic of China pursuant to Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. § 2411) (“Trade Act”). The United States Trade Representative (“USTR”) conducted an investigation into China’s unfair intellectual property policies and practices pursuant to Section 301 of the Trade Act. Section 304 of the Trade Act (19 U.S.C. § 2414) requires the USTR to determine what action to take, if any, within 12 months after initiation of the investigation. Within the 12 months following initiation of the investigation, the USTR determined to impose import tariffs on goods from China pursuant to Section 301(b) of the Trade Act on two groupings of tariff codes, commonly referred to as “List 1” and “List 2.” USTR subsequently implemented tariffs on additional tariff codes, known as “List 3” and “List 4A,” but

failed to do so within 12 months after initiation of the investigation. Section 307 of the Trade Act (19 U.S.C. § 2417) authorizes USTR to modify a prior valid action under Section 301(b), but does not authorize USTR to impose additional tariffs not tied to the acts, policies or practices that are the subject of the investigation. USTR’s determination to implement tariffs on List 3 and List 4 was not a valid modification of its initial action because it was not based on the acts, policies or practices covered by the investigation. The arbitrary manner in which Defendants implemented the List 3 and List 4 tariff actions also violates the Administrative Procedure Act (“APA”). USTR: (1) failed to provide sufficient opportunity for comment, e.g., requiring interested parties to submit affirmative and rebuttal comments *on the same day*; (2) failed to consider relevant factors when making its decision, e.g., undertaking no analysis of the supposed “increased burden” imposed on U.S. commerce from the unfair policies and practices that it originally investigated; and (3) failed to connect the record facts to the choices it made. Despite receiving over 6,000 comments, USTR was silent as to its consideration of those comments in promulgating List 3.

2. The Court should set aside Defendants’ actions as *ultra vires* and otherwise contrary to law, as well as order Defendants to refund any duties paid by Plaintiff pursuant to List 3 and/or List 4A with interest as provided by law.

JURISDICTION

3. The Court possesses subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1581(i)(1)(B), which confers “exclusive jurisdiction” to the Court over “any civil action commenced against the United States, its agencies, or its officers, that arises out of any law of the United States providing for . . . tariffs, duties, fees, or other taxes on the importation of merchandise for reasons other than the raising of revenue.” 28 U.S.C. § 1581(i)(1)(B).

PARTIES

4. Plaintiff is an importer of various products subject to duties under List 3 or 4A.

5. Defendant United States received the disputed tariffs and is the statutory defendant under 5 U.S.C. § 702 and 28 U.S.C. § 1581(i).

6. USTR is an executive agency of the United States charged with investigating a foreign country's trade practices under Section 301 of the Trade Act and implementing "appropriate" responses, subject to the direction of the President. USTR conducted the Section 301 investigation at issue and made numerous decisions regarding List 3 and List 4.

7. Ambassador Robert Lighthizer currently holds the position of USTR and serves as the director of the Office of the USTR. In these capacities, he made numerous decisions regarding List 3 and List 4.

8. Defendant U.S. Customs & Border Protection ("CBP") is the agency that collects duties on imports. CBP collected payments made by Plaintiff to account for the tariffs imposed by USTR under List 3 and List 4.

9. Defendant Mark A. Morgan is the Acting Commissioner of CBP. In this capacity, he oversees CBP's collection of duties paid by Plaintiff under List 3 and/or List 4. Plaintiff has standing to sue because it is "adversely affected or aggrieved by agency action within the meaning of the APA. 5 U.S.C. § 702; 28 U.S.C. § 2631(i). Tariffs imposed by Defendants pursuant to List 3 and/or List 4A adversely affected and aggrieved Plaintiff because it was required to pay and did pay these unlawful duties.

TIMELINESS OF THE ACTION

10. A plaintiff must commence an action under 28 U.S.C. § 1581(i)(1)(B) "within two years after the cause of action first accrues." 28 U.S.C. § 2636(i).

11. Plaintiff contests action taken by Defendants that resulted in List 3 and List 4 and the subsequent imposition of tariffs on Plaintiff. *Notice of Modification of Section 301 Action: China's Acts, Policies, and Practices Related to Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property, and Innovation*, 83 Fed. Reg. 47,974 (Sept. 21, 2018). Plaintiff's claims accrued at the earliest on September 24, 2018, when tariffs were first levied on goods on List 3 pursuant to the USTR's determination published in the Federal Register on September 21, 2018. *Id.*

12. The instant action was filed within two years of the date that Plaintiff paid the List 3 and List 4A duties.

RELEVANT LAW

13. Section 301 of the Trade Act authorizes USTR to investigate a foreign country's trade practices. 19 U.S.C. § 2411(b). If the investigation reveals an "unreasonable or discriminatory" practice, USTR may take "appropriate" action, such as imposing tariffs on imports from the country that administered the unfair practice. *Id.* § 2411(b), (c)(1)(B).

14. Section 304 of the Trade Act requires USTR to determine what action to take, if any, within 12 months after the initiation of the underlying investigation. *Id.* § 2414(a)(1)(B), (2)(B).

15. Section 307 of the Trade Act (in pertinent part) allows USTR to "modify or terminate" an action taken pursuant to Section 301 of the Trade Act either when the "burden or restriction on United States commerce" imposed by the investigated foreign country's practice has "increased or decreased" or when the action "is no longer appropriate." *Id.* § 2417(a)(1)(B), (C).

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

I. USTR's Investigation

16. On August 14, 2017, President Trump directed Ambassador Lighthizer to consider initiating a targeted investigation pursuant to Section 301(b) of the Trade Act concerning China's laws, policies, practices, and actions related to intellectual property, innovation, and technology. *Addressing China's Laws, Policies, Practices, and Actions Related to Intellectual Property, Innovation, and Technology*, 82 Fed. Reg. 39,007 (Aug. 17, 2017). According to the President, certain Chinese "laws, policies, practices, and actions" on intellectual property, innovation, and technology "may inhibit United States exports, deprive United States citizens of fair remuneration for their innovations, divert American jobs to workers in China, contribute to our trade deficit with China, and otherwise undermine American manufacturing, services, and innovation." *Id.*

17. On August 18, 2017, USTR formally initiated an investigation into "whether acts, policies, and practices of the Government of China related to technology transfer, intellectual property, and innovation are actionable under [Section 301(b) of] the Trade Act." *Initiation of Section 301 Investigation; Hearing; and Request for Public Comments: China's Acts, Policies, and Practices Related to Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property, and Innovation*, 82 Fed. Reg. 40,213 (Aug. 24, 2017).

18. On March 22, 2018, USTR released a report announcing the results of its investigation. OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE, *Findings of the Investigation Into China's Acts, Policies, And Practices Related to Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property, and Innovation Under Section 301 of The Trade Act of 1974* (Mar. 22, 2018), available at <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/Section%20301%20FINAL.PDF>. USTR found that certain "acts, policies, and practices of the Chinese government related to technology transfer, intellectual property, and innovation are unreasonable or discriminatory and burden or restrict U.S. commerce." *Id.* at 17.

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