THE PREDICTIVE INFORMATION CONTENT OF EXTERNAL IMBALANCES FOR EXCHANGE RATE RETURNS: HOW MUCH IS IT WORTH?

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Abstract—This paper examines the exchange rate predictability stemming from the equilibrium model of international financial adjustment developed by Gourinchas and Rey (2007). Using predictive variables that measure cyclical external imbalances for country pairs, we assess the ability of this model to forecast out-of-sample four major U.S. dollar exchange rates using various economic criteria of model evaluation. The analysis shows that the model provides economic value to a risk-averse investor, delivering substantial utility gains when switching from a portfolio strategy based on the random walk benchmark to one that conditions on cyclical external imbalances.

I. Introduction

Exchange rate movements are a major source of risk to a number of economic agents, and, not surprisingly, understanding the determinants of exchange rate fluctuations continues to draw serious consideration among academics, policymakers, and practitioners. The foreign exchange (FX) market is also the largest financial market, with a daily turnover exceeding $3 trillion U.S. dollars, a third of it in spot transactions (Bank for International Settlements, 2007). Unfortunately, attempts to explain and forecast exchange rates using either economically meaningful variables or sound theoretical models have generally met with limited success. While a few papers find some evidence of predictability using macro variables at long horizons (Mark, 1995; Abhyankar, Sarno, & Valente, 2005), the conventional wisdom is that economic fundamentals are of little use and exchange rates are well approximated by a naive random walk model, at least at horizons shorter than one year (Mees & Rogoff, 1983; Engel, Mark, & West, 2008; Rogoff & Stavrakeva, 2008).

The challenge to relate exchange rates to economic fundamentals received an important development with the model of international financial adjustment of Gourinchas and Rey (2007; hereafter GR). The model gives useful insights on the sustainability of the high current account deficits experienced since 2002 by the United States, highlighting the role that valuation effects in the U.S. net foreign asset position might have in relaxing its external constraint. The implication of the model we focus on is that a suitably constructed measure of U.S. cyclical external imbalances, which GR term \( n_{xa} \), should be linked to future movements in the U.S. dollar exchange rate. GR provide empirical support in favor of this prediction using data for the U.S. dollar effective exchange rate both in sample and out of sample.

The promise of the simple structural model of GR to forecast exchange rate returns deserves careful empirical examination, and this paper provides a measure of its worth. We move beyond assessing predictability from a purely statistical perspective and provide evidence on whether the predictive information in \( n_{xa} \) is economically significant. To this end, we assess the economic value of exchange rate predictability originating from \( n_{xa} \) relative to the random walk benchmark in the context of a stylized dynamic asset allocation strategy. Specifically, in a mean-variance framework, we study the problem of a U.S. investor who manages a dynamically rebalanced portfolio by allocating his wealth to a domestic bond and four foreign bonds (for Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan). We compare the out-of-sample performance of a benchmark portfolio strategy based on the random walk relative to a portfolio strategy that exploits the predictive information in \( n_{xa} \). The economic assessment uses a utility-based criterion to compute the performance fee that a risk-averse investor with quadratic utility would be willing to pay to switch from the benchmark strategy to the alternative strategy conditioning on \( n_{xa} \). In addition, we employ the performance measure recently proposed by Goetzmann et al. (2007), which assumes neither a specific utility function nor a specific distribution of portfolio returns. Also, we consider the impact of transaction costs and real-time data on these performance measures. In short, we provide an economic test of the predictive power of \( n_{xa} \).

The emphasis on economic evaluation of the predictive power of \( n_{xa} \) requires moving to a set of bilateral exchange rates, while GR carry out their empirical work using data for the U.S. effective exchange rate. This is important because bilateral exchange rates are the prices of the traded assets that are relevant to investors. Hence, bilateral predictive variables are needed to assess the predictive power of the information content in \( n_{xa} \) in the context of portfolio choice. As predictive variables, we use empirical proxies for bilateral external imbalances between the United States and other major countries (instead of using a single measure of U.S. global external imbalances). Using data at the quarterly frequency from 1973...

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The thinking of the model builds on earlier work on stock returns predictability by Campbell and Shiller (1998) and Lettau and Ludvigson (2001), carefully steered toward an international setting.

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to 2007 for four major U.S. dollar exchange rates, the construction of the bilateral external imbalances follows GR but requires some amendments when one moves away from the U.S. effective exchange rate. We construct these measures using an updated version of the data set compiled by Lane and Milesi-Ferretti (2007) on foreign assets and liabilities. The empirical analysis provides robust evidence that bilateral external imbalances have strong predictive ability for exchange rate returns both in-sample and out-of-sample on the basis of several performance measures. We find large economic value to an investor who allocates capital internationally simply using the predictive information in \( nxa \). Specifically, the evidence shows that the economic value of \( nxa \) is larger than the economic value obtainable from trading on the basis of the random walk benchmark. We conclude that \( nxa \) captures information about future exchange rate movements during the recent floating period, as one would expect from a state variable that summarizes the expectations of rational economic agents about future exchange rate returns. This result is very encouraging, given the evidence provided by a vast body of literature on exchange rates that the state of the economy is not related in a meaningful fashion to short-run fluctuations in exchange rates.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we briefly review the relevant literature on exchange rate predictability conditioning on fundamentals and describe the essence of GR. We also discuss the empirical extension of this model for bilateral exchange rate predictability. Section III describes the data and reports the estimation results for regressions that investigate the predictive power of \( nxa \) for exchange rate returns at various horizons. Section IV outlines the framework for assessing the economic value of exchange rate predictability for a risk-averse investor with a dynamic portfolio allocation strategy. Section V reports the empirical results for the economic value analysis. Finally, section VI concludes. In the appendix, we provide details on the real-time data set and on bootstrap methods.

II. Exchange Rates and Fundamentals

In this section, we briefly review the current state of the literature on fundamentals and exchange rate predictability before presenting the model of international financial adjustment developed by GR and its empirical extension to bilateral exchange rates.

A. Stylized Facts and Exchange Rate Predictability

Economic fundamentals can generally explain at most a small part of nominal exchange rate changes (Kilian, 1999; Berkowitz & Giorianni, 2001; Sarno, 2005; Engel et al., 2008). There are a number of explanations for this apparent disconnect puzzle. They include the recognition that in a present-value asset-pricing framework, the exchange rate would follow a process very close to a random walk if at least one predictive variable has a unit root and the discount factor is close to unity (Engel & West, 2005), the failure of standard linear predictive regressions to capture the presence of parameter instability (Rossi, 2005, 2006; Sarno & Valente, 2009), the role of transaction costs (Obstfeld & Rogoff, 2001), the presence of higher-order expectations and information heterogeneity (Bacchetta & van Wincoop, 2006), and the general issue of omitted fundamental variables (such as GR).

B. International Financial Adjustment and Exchange Rates

Starting from a country’s intertemporal budget constraint, suitably adjusted for slow-moving structural changes, GR show that current external imbalances must predict either future net export growth or future returns on the net foreign asset portfolio, or both. Since the exchange rate plays a critical role for both future net exports and future returns on external assets and liabilities, it follows that today’s imbalances contain valuable information about future exchange rate returns. Intuitively, depreciation of the domestic currency contributes to the process of international adjustment through future trade surpluses. This is the trade channel, suggested by the traditional approach to the current account (Obstfeld & Rogoff, 2007). However, the external adjustment can also take place through a different mechanism since a domestic currency depreciation may increase the value of foreign assets (denominated in foreign currency) relative to foreign liabilities (denominated in domestic currency). This change in net foreign portfolio returns causes a net wealth transfer, thus contributing to external adjustment by the valuation channel.4

To clarify these implications, consider the external budget constraint of a country between time \( t \) and \( t+1 \):

\[
NA_{t+1} \equiv R_{t+1} (NA_t + NX_t),
\]

where \( NA_t \) denotes net foreign assets, defined as external assets minus external liabilities; \( NX \) is net exports, defined as the difference between exports and imports of goods and services; and \( R_{t+1} \) is the gross return on the net foreign asset portfolio, a combination of the gross return on assets and the gross return on liabilities. The accumulation identity (1) simply states that the net foreign asset position improves with

3 Alquist and Chinn (2008) also emphasize the need to move to bilateral exchange rates and test the ability of \( nxa \) to forecast three U.S. bilateral exchange rates. They find good in-sample results but poor out-of-sample evidence. However, they do not use bilateral measures of external imbalances, essentially employing the same predictive variable (the U.S. global external imbalances) to forecast various bilateral exchange rates. Moreover, a key difference in our research is the emphasis on economic evaluation of the predictive information in \( nxa \) as a complement to statistical tests.

4 This is especially true for the United States since almost all foreign liabilities are denominated in U.S. dollars, whereas a large fraction of the foreign assets are in foreign currency. A U.S. dollar depreciation, then, would transfer net wealth from the rest of the world to the United States.
positive net exports and the return on the net foreign asset portfolio.

To investigate the implications of the external budget constraint, exports, imports, and external assets and liabilities are normalized relative to domestic wealth and adjusted for slow-moving trends attributed to structural changes in the world economy, such as financial and trade integration. Under fairly general assumptions, the first-order approximation of equation (1) around its trend satisfies

\[ nx_{t+1} \approx \frac{1}{\rho} nx_t + r_{t+1} + \Delta nx_{t+1}. \]

(2)

The term \( nx_t \) is a linear combination of stationary components of (log) exports, imports, and foreign assets and liabilities relative to domestic wealth, and it incorporates information from both the trade balance (the flow) and the foreign asset position (the stock). It represents a theoretically motivated measure of cyclical external imbalances that increases with foreign assets and exports and decreases with foreign liabilities and imports. The discount factor \( \rho \) depends on the steady-state average ratio of net exports to net foreign assets. The component \( r_{t+1} \) is the real rate on net foreign assets, which increases with the return on foreign assets and declines with the return on foreign liabilities. The term \( \Delta nx_{t+1} \) denotes detrended net export growth between \( t \) and \( t+1 \), which increases with cyclical export growth and decreases with cyclical import growth. Equation (2) suggests that a country can enhance its net foreign asset position via either a trade surplus (\( \Delta nx_{t+1} > 0 \)) or high returns on its net foreign asset portfolio (\( r_{t+1} > 0 \)).

The next step defines the intertemporal external budget constraint. Under the assumption that the economy settles into a balanced-growth path, GR solve forward equation (2) and obtain the following intertemporal external constraint in deviation from its trend:

\[ nx_t \approx - \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} \rho^j (r_{t+j} + \Delta nx_{t+j}). \]

(3)

which requires the no-Ponzi condition that \( nx_t \) cannot grow faster than the steady-state growth-adjusted interest rate.\(^5\) Since equation (1) is an identity, equation (3) must hold both ex post and ex ante along every sample path, implying that it will also hold in expectation

\[ nx_t \approx - \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} \rho^j E_t (r_{t+j} + \Delta nx_{t+j}). \]

(4)

This equation plays a critical role in this model of international financial adjustment. It shows that time variation in \( nx \) must forecast either future portfolio returns or future net export growth, or both. Consider, for instance, a country with either a cyclical trade deficit or a cyclical debt position or both. In this case, a negative value of \( nx \) anticipates not only future trade surpluses (\( E_t \Delta nx_{t+j} > 0 \)) but also an increase in future returns on net foreign assets (\( E_t r_{t+j} > 0 \)). The former effect, the trade channel, is a standard implication of the intertemporal approach to the current account. The latter effect is the valuation channel and represents the key mechanism of GR.

Exchange rate predictability is a natural implication of this mechanism of financial adjustment. For example, if foreign assets are entirely denominated in foreign currency and foreign liabilities are entirely denominated in domestic currency, then the real return on the net foreign portfolio between time \( t \) and \( t+1 \) can be written as

\[ r_{t+1} = |\mu^a| (n^a + \Delta S_{t+1}) - |\mu^l| (r_{t+1} - \pi_{t+1}). \]

(5)

where \( n^a \) is the nominal return on foreign assets in foreign currency; \( \Delta S_{t+1} \) is the log change in the nominal exchange rate (defined as the domestic price of the foreign currency), \( r_{t+1} \) is the nominal return on foreign liabilities in domestic currency, \( \pi_{t+1} \) is the realized domestic inflation rate, and \( \mu^a \) and \( \mu^l \) are the (trend) share of assets and liabilities in the net foreign asset portfolio, respectively. If the local currency return is assumed to be constant, a currency depreciation increases the domestic return on foreign assets. This negative correlation between \( nx_t \) and future exchange rate movements is amplified by the degree of leverage of the net foreign asset holdings when \(|\mu^a| > 1\).

In brief, a combination of exports, imports, and external assets and liabilities can capture the expectations of rational agents about future exchange rate movements. A positive value of \( nx \) predicts a future currency appreciation, whereas a negative value anticipates a future currency depreciation.

C. Extension to Bilateral Exchange Rates

In GR, \( nx \) is constructed using aggregate exports, imports, and foreign assets and liabilities and is shown to contain significant out-of-sample forecasting power at horizons from one to sixteen quarters for two series of multilateral nominal exchange rates: the foreign direct investment (FDI)–weighted effective exchange rate and the Federal Reserve trade-weighted effective exchange rate for the U.S. dollar against major currencies. We refer to this definition of \( nx \) as the global measure of cyclical external imbalances.\(^6\) In the context of this paper, a bilateral measure of cyclical external imbalances is desirable because effective exchange rates are

\(^5\)In turn, the assumption of a balanced-growth path implies that the rate of growth of external assets cannot permanently exceed the rate of growth of the economy, and the long-term growth rate of the economy is lower than the steady-state rate of return. If these assumptions hold, then the steady-state average ratio of net exports to net foreign assets satisfies \( NX/NA = \rho - 1 < 0 \). This means that countries with long-run creditor positions (\( NA > 0 \)) should run trade deficits (\( NX < 0 \)), and countries with long-run debtor positions (\( NA < 0 \)) should run trade surpluses (\( NX > 0 \)).

\(^6\)The term global is used interchangeably with multilateral or aggregate in this paper.
not tradable assets. Investors form expectations and allocate their wealth on the basis of bilateral exchange rates, since these are the prices they observe and are important to their portfolio returns.

However, a bilateral measure of cyclical global imbalances is not directly observable since data on a bilateral basis are generally not available. One might be tempted to use global nxa as a proxy for the unobservable bilateral nxa. We argue that this practice may not be entirely appropriate since global nxa captures not only information related to the bilateral exchange rate of interest but also about other trading partners. In essence, global nxa, if used as a predictive variable in a regression for bilateral exchange rate returns, would cause an errors-in-variable problem, potentially leading to inconsistent least squares estimates.

An important caveat is in order at this point. The GR analysis is valid at the aggregate level for the effective exchange rate since it starts from a country’s intertemporal budget constraint. As there is no bilateral budget constraint, the adaptation of the GR analysis to a bilateral context raises conceptual issues. Specifically, it is clear that in an N-country (N > 2) world, the budget constraint needs to hold only on aggregate, not bilaterally. For example, a country could run a persistent deficit with another country as long it runs a similar-size surplus with other economies. It is easy to think of examples where the use of bilateral measures of external imbalances may be problematic. Consider the currency of a country with an approximately balanced external position—for example, the euro. This would imply that the intertemporal budget constraint should have no impact on the exchange rate. However, this country is likely to have negative and positive positions with individual trading partners. The empirical analysis based on bilateral measures of external imbalances would imply that these positions should affect the bilateral exchange rate, but this is not implied by the budget constraint given that the country is in a balanced external position on aggregate.  

To summarize, on the one hand, the theory has clear implications about the predictive power of global nxa for the effective exchange rate, with the information content of the predictive power stemming from the intertemporal budget constraint. On the other hand, the theory has no clear implications for bilateral exchange rates, which are the traded assets that investors care about and form expectations of. Adapting the GR framework to a bilateral setting prevents us from being able to state forcefully that the information content in bilateral nxa is necessarily linked to the budget constraint. Regardless of these conceptual issues, we use a bilateral measure of cyclical external imbalances in the core empirical analysis. We argue that an empirically based bilateral nxa that is derived from global nxa may well capture part of the information content stemming from the budget constraint, that is, only the subset of the information content that is related to the country pair whose exchange rate we are interested in. Put another way, this empirically based bilateral nxa has a weaker theoretical justification than global nxa, but we demonstrate that it is empirically superior to global nxa, presumably because it mitigates the errors-in-variable problem that arises when using global nxa to predict a bilateral exchange rate.

Ultimately we aim at estimating the following predictive regression:

$$\Delta_k s_{t+k}^{(i)} / k = \alpha + \beta nxa_t^{(i)} + \epsilon_{t+k},$$  

where $s_{t}^{(i)}$ is the log nominal exchange rate at time $t$, defined as the domestic price of foreign currency $i$; $\Delta_k s_{t+k}^{(i)} = s_{t+k}^{(i)} - s_{t}^{(i)}$ is the nominal exchange rate return between time $t$ and $t + k$; and $nxa_t^{(i)}$ is the bilateral measure of cyclical external imbalances between the domestic economy and the foreign country $i$ at time $t$. In our setting, the United States is the domestic economy. Since data on bilateral external assets and liabilities are not available, we can directly measure nxa, (the global measure of cyclical external imbalances) but not nxa, (the bilateral measure of cyclical external imbalances between the domestic economy and foreign economy $i$). To overcome this problem, we proceed with an instrumental variables (IV) estimator in two steps. In the first step, nxa, for the domestic economy is regressed on a set of instruments. In the second step, the fitted value from the first-step regression is used as a proxy for nxa, in regression (6), which is estimated by ordinary least squares.

The IV method requires, however, a set of instruments that are correlated with domestic global nxa, but uncorrelated with the measurement error—that is, uncorrelated with the external position of the domestic economy versus other countries. We consider two instruments. The first candidate is the global nxa, for foreign country $i$, which obviously must contain the same information about the domestic economy and the foreign country $i$ as the global nxa, for the domestic economy. As an additional instrument, we use the bilateral detrended net exports $nve_{t}^{(i)}$ between the domestic economy and the foreign economy $i$, constructed as a linear combination of the stationary components of (log) bilateral exports and imports to wealth ratios. We provide evidence on the validity of these instrumental variables in the empirical analysis using a Sargan test statistic.

As an illustrative example, suppose we want to predict the nominal exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and the British pound. First, we regress the U.S. global nxa, on a constant term, the U.K. global nxa, and the bilateral detrended net exports between the United States and the United Kingdom.
Second, we use the fitted value from this contemporaneous regression as the predictive variable in regression (6), where $\Delta x_{t-1}^{(i)}$ is the $k$-period nominal exchange rate return between the U.S. dollar and the British pound.

III. Empirical Results

A. Data and Descriptive Statistics

The data set consists of quarterly observations ranging from 1973Q1 to 2007Q4 and comprises four spot exchange rates relative to the U.S. dollar (USD); the Canadian dollar (CAD), the Deutsche mark/euro (EUR), the British pound (GBP), and the Japanese yen (JPY). These data are obtained from the International Monetary Fund’s International Financial Statistics (IFS) database. In the economic evaluation exercise, we also use the Eurocurrency deposit rates with three-month maturity obtained from Datastream as a proxy for the riskless rate.

Turning to the macroeconomic data, we obtain annual data on foreign assets and liabilities for the United States, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan from Lane and Milesi-Ferretti (2007); seasonally unadjusted quarterly data on exports and imports of goods and services from the IFS database (Canada, Germany, and Japan), the UK National Statistics, and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA); seasonally unadjusted quarterly data on bilateral exports and imports of goods and services between the United States and each of Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan from BEA. As proxy for domestic wealth, we collect annual data on persons and unincorporated business net worth from Statistics Canada; annual data on household fixed assets from the Federal Statistics Office of Germany; annual data on household net worth from Japan Statistics Bureau; quarterly data on households and nonprofit organizations net worth from Flow of Funds of the United States; and annual data on household and nonprofit institutions net worth from the UK National Statistics. We seasonally adjust the data on exports and imports using dummy-variable regressions and construct quarterly observations from annual data on assets, liabilities, and net worth by linear interpolation. In the out-of-sample analysis, however, to avoid any look-ahead bias, we recursively seasonally adjust the exports and imports series and use linear extrapolation for assets, liabilities, and net worth.

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for quarterly percentage changes in (log) external assets $\Delta a_t$, external liabilities $\Delta l_t$, exports $\Delta x_t$, and imports $\Delta m_t$; the global measure of cyclical external imbalances $nxa_t$; the bilateral measure of cyclical external imbalances $nxa_{t}^{(i)}$; and the nominal exchange rate return $\Delta x_{t-1}^{(i)}$. The global measure of cyclical external imbalances, $nxa_t$, is defined as a linear combination of detrended (log) exports, imports, foreign assets, and liabilities relative to domestic wealth. The bilateral measure of cyclical external imbalances between the domestic country and a foreign country $i$, $nxa_{t}^{(i)}$ is constructed as described in the previous section. In our setting, the United States is the domestic country, while Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan are the foreign countries. As one would expect, foreign assets and liabilities show lower volatility and higher serial correlation than exports and imports. For the sample period investigated, $nxa_t$ has a sample mean of 0, a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Sd</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Sd</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Sd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2.762</td>
<td>2.208</td>
<td>2.150</td>
<td>2.119</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.733</td>
<td>2.809</td>
<td>1.862</td>
<td>1.824</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2.642</td>
<td>2.646</td>
<td>1.799</td>
<td>1.754</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>3.419</td>
<td>3.515</td>
<td>2.348</td>
<td>2.351</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\Delta$ indicates the log period-over-period changes, $\Delta l$ the log foreign liabilities, $\Delta x$ the log domestic exports, and $\Delta m$ the log domestic imports. $nxa$ is the global measure of cyclical imbalances, which linearly combines stationary components in foreign assets, liabilities, exports and imports as in Gourinchas and Rey (2007). $nxa_{t}^{(i)}$ is the bilateral measure of cyclical imbalances between the United States and foreign country $i$. $\rho_1$ is the log of the nominal exchange rate between the United States and foreign country $i$. $s_1$ denotes first differences ($s_1 = \Delta - s_0$). The mean and standard deviations are reported in percentage units. $\rho_1$ is the autocorrelation coefficient for a lag of 1 quarters. The data set covers quarterly data from 1973Q1 to 2007Q4.

8 From 1973 to 1985 we construct these data for Germany assuming the same shares of exports and imports versus the United States as of December 1986.
large standard deviation, and high serial correlation. Comparable properties are displayed by $nxa_t^{(i)}$. Finally, the exchange rate returns present sample means close to 0, a standard deviation ranging between 2.677% and 6.010%, and very low serial correlation.

**B. Data Comparison with GR**

Before investigating the predictive ability of the bilateral measures of U.S. cyclical external imbalances, it is important to notice that our data source of aggregate exports, imports, external assets, and liabilities for the United States differs from GR. However, our measure of $nxa$ has comparable properties to the measure used by GR. This similarity is visually clear in figure 1, which plots time series for $nxat$ used by GR based on quarterly data ranging from 1952Q1 to 2004Q1; and (c) our time series of $nxat$ using quarterly data from 1973Q1 to 2007Q4. The three time series, which are normalized to have 0 means and unit standard deviations, co-move strongly throughout the original time series of $nxat$. The dotted line denotes $nxat$ constructed in this paper using quarterly data from 1973Q1 to 2007Q4. The time series are normalized to have 0 means and unit standard deviations.

C. Extension to Bilateral Exchange Rates

This section documents the in-sample predictive power of the bilateral measures of U.S. cyclical external imbalances (as opposed to aggregate) on bilateral exchange rate returns (as opposed to effective). We proceed using the framework described in section IIC. First, we regress the U.S. aggregate $nxa$ on a constant term, the foreign aggregate $nxa$, and the bilateral detrended net exports between the United States and the foreign country. Second, the fitted value from this regression is used as the bilateral measure of cyclical external imbalances between the United States and the foreign country in the predictive regression (6) to forecast the $k$-period-ahead nominal exchange rate return between the USD and the foreign currency.

Table 2 displays the estimation results for the predictive regression (6), where $nxa_t^{(i)}$ is the bilateral measure of external imbalances for the United States relative to Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan, respectively; $\Delta_k s_{i+k}^{(x)}$ is the $k$-period nominal exchange rate return for CAD, EUR, GBP, and JPY, respectively; and the horizon $k$ ranges from one quarter to sixteen quarters. We also report in table 2 the results from carrying out a Sargan test for the null hypothesis of valid instruments (overidentifying restrictions). These tests confirm the validity of the set of instruments used in the first-stage regression that generates our proxy for bilateral external imbalances, with $p$-values ranging from 0.123 to 0.980.

The estimated coefficients on $nxa_t^{(i)}$ are generally negative, as expected. The empirical evidence is particularly strong for EUR, where the coefficients are large in magnitude and strongly statistically significant. For JPY, the predictive

$$
\Delta_k s_{i+k}^{(x)} = \alpha + \beta nxa_t + \epsilon_{i+k},
$$

where $s_i$ is the log-nominal effective exchange rate (NEER) of the USD at time $t$; $\Delta_k s_{i+k} = s_{i+k} - s_i$; the horizon $k$ ranges from one quarter to sixteen quarters; and $nxa_t$ is the U.S. aggregate cyclical external position at time $t$. The U.S. NEER is the trade-weighted exchange rate from the IFS database. The results (not tabulated to conserve space) suggest that the estimates of $\beta$ have the expected negative sign and are statistically significant at all horizons, although the magnitude tends to be slightly smaller than in GR. The $R^2$ increases with $k$, peaking at $k = 8$ (two-year horizon), where it reaches 43%, before declining to 26% for $k = 16$ (four-year horizon). We also assess the out-of-sample performance of $nxa_t$, by evaluating whether the predictive regression (7) has a significantly lower mean squared error (MSE) than the driftless random walk model. We employ the Clark and West (2007) MSE-adjusted statistic for the null hypothesis of equal MSE between the competing models, using forecasts based on a twenty-year rolling window and calculating the one-sided $p$-value for the statistic by bootstrap. The results confirm the out-of-sample forecast accuracy of $nxa_t$, first documented by GR.
power of $nxa_{i}^{(i)}$ is statistically significant up to two years ahead at the 1% significance level (or up to three years ahead at the 10% significance level), whereas for CAD, statistical significance is established at least at the 5% level from one year onward. The results are slightly weaker for GBP, where the coefficient on $nxa_{i}^{(i)}$ is significant only for horizons longer than two years. Moreover, while the predictive power of external imbalances decreases at longer horizons for JPY, the evidence is reversed for CAD, EUR, and GBP.

Figure 2 reports the exchange rate returns and the bilateral cyclical imbalances for each country in our sample for $k = 1$. The dotted lines represent quarterly exchange rate returns, and the solid lines are the lagged measures of bilateral external imbalances. Notice that the time series are standardized to have 0 means and unit standard deviations. The graphs provide a visual illustration of the general negative comovement between exchange rate returns and the lagged bilateral measures of external imbalances. This comovement becomes even clearer when aggregating the time series of exchange rate returns at annual frequency (for $k = 4$), as shown in figure 3.

Overall, the empirical results in this section extend the validity of the GR model to bilateral exchange rates when bilateral measures of cyclical external imbalances are employed. We now turn to the analysis of the economic value of the predictive power of $nxa_{i}^{(i)}$, since statistical evidence of predictability does not necessarily imply economic significance (Leitch & Tanner, 1991; Elliott & Ito, 1999; Della Corte, Sarno, & Thornton, 2008).

### IV. Economic Value: The Setting

In this section, we describe the framework used to examine the economic significance of models that condition on bilateral measures of cyclical external imbalances.

#### A. The Dynamic FX Strategies

We consider a U.S. investor with a quarterly rebalancing period who builds a portfolio by allocating his wealth between the domestic bond (United States) and four foreign bonds (Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan). The domestic and foreign riskless assets are proxied by three-month Eurocurrency deposits. The yield of the foreign bonds is riskless in local currency but risky when expressed in domestic currency. Indeed, the return a U.S. investor enjoys from investing in a foreign bond between $t$ and $t + 1$ is equal to the foreign riskless return known at time $t$ adjusted by the exchange rate return observed at time $t + 1$. This implies that at time $t$, the only risk the U.S. investor is exposed to is FX risk.

Each period the investor takes two steps. First, he uses the model that conditions on $nxa_{i}^{(i)}$ to forecast the one-period-ahead exchange rate returns. Note that the investor does not model the dynamics of the conditional covariance matrix of exchange rate returns but simply uses the unconditional covariance matrix at time $t$ to forecast the covariance matrix for the next period. Second, using these forecasts, the investor dynamically rebalances his portfolio by computing new optimal portfolio weights based on a mean-variance strategy.
Figure 2.—Bilateral Cyclical Imbalances and Quarterly Exchange Rate Returns

The figure displays $s_i^t - s_i^{t+1}$ (dotted line) and $nxa_i^t$ (solid line). $s_i^t$ denotes the log of the nominal exchange rate between the USD and the CAD, EUR, GBP, and JPY, respectively. The exchange rate is defined as units of USD per unit of foreign currency. $nxa_i^t$ is bilateral measure of cyclical imbalance between the United States and Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan, respectively. The data set comprises quarterly data ranging from 1973Q1 to 2007Q4. The time series are normalized to have 0 means and unit standard deviations.

a benchmark model, we use the driftless random walk, which is equivalent to setting $\alpha = \beta = 0$ in the predictive regression (6). It follows that the conditional expectation of exchange rate returns is equal to 0, consistent with the majority of studies in the literature since Meese and Rogoff (1983).

The main goal of this setting is to determine whether the model conditioning on the bilateral measures of U.S. cyclical imbalances is economically superior to the naive random walk benchmark. It is important to note that the asset allocation exercise does not use data in real time, although it is well known that economic data are generally subject to release delays and revisions over time. Moreover, the exchange rate used in the asset allocation is not a transaction price and does not allow for the bid-ask spread, hence ignoring transaction costs. Therefore, we do not claim that a real-world investor acting on the predictive information in $nxa$ would have gained exactly the returns reported here. Our objective is not to design an executable asset allocation strategy but to measure the economic significance of the information content in external imbalances for the purpose of forecasting exchange rates, as a complement to the statistical analysis reported earlier. However, we investigate to some extent the robustness of our results to transaction costs and the use of real-time data later in the paper.

B. Mean-Variance Dynamic Asset Allocation

Mean-variance analysis is a natural framework to evaluate the economic performance of an asset allocation strategy. We consider an investor who dynamically rebalances his portfolio every quarter by maximizing expected portfolio returns while achieving a desired portfolio volatility. This maximum return strategy leads to a portfolio allocation on the efficient frontier. The dynamic portfolio weights are computed by implementing the maximum return strategy using the forecasts of the conditional mean and conditional variance-covariance matrix. Let $r_{t+1}$ denote the $N \times 1$ vector of risky asset returns; $\mu_{t+1|t} = E_t[r_{t+1}|t]$ is the conditional expectation of $r_{t+1}$, and $\Sigma_{t+1|t} = E_t[(r_{t+1} - \mu_{t+1|t})(r_{t+1} - \mu_{t+1|t})']$ is
the conditional variance-covariance matrix of $r_{t+1}$. At each period $t$, the investor solves the following problem:

$$\max_{w_t} \left\{ \mu_{p,t+1|t} = w_t^\prime \mu_{t+1|t} + (1 - w_t^\prime) r_f \right\}$$

s.t. \( (\sigma_p^*)^2 = w_t^\prime \Sigma_{t+1|t} w_t \), \hspace{1cm} (8)

where $w_t$ is the $N \times 1$ vector of portfolio weights on the risky assets, $\mu_{p,t+1|t}$ is the conditional expected return of the portfolio, $\sigma_p^*$ is the target volatility of the portfolio returns, and $r_f$ is the domestic riskless return. The solution to this optimization problem delivers the risky asset weights,

$$w_t = \frac{\sigma_p^*}{\sqrt{C_t}} \Sigma_{t+1|t}^{-1} (\mu_{t+1|t} - r_f),$$

where $C_t = (\mu_{t+1|t} - r_f)^\prime \Sigma_{t+1|t}^{-1} (\mu_{t+1|t} - r_f)$. The weight on the riskless asset is $(1 - w_t^\prime)$. The gross portfolio return at time $t + 1$ is computed as

$$R_{p,t+1} = 1 + w_t^\prime r_{t+1} + (1 - w_t^\prime) r_f = R_f + w_t^\prime (R_t - r_f),$$

where $R_t$ is the $N \times 1$ vector of gross risky returns and $R_f$ is the gross domestic riskless return. Recall that since we do not model the conditional covariance matrix of exchange rate returns, we simply set $\Sigma_{t+1|t} = \Sigma_t$, where $\Sigma_t$ is the unconditional covariance matrix of the exchange rate returns at time $t$.

C. Performance Measures

The performance of strategies exploiting the predictive information in $nxa_t^{(i)}$ is ranked against the benchmark strategy based on the driftless random walk using a utility-based criterion. This measure reflects the close relation between mean-variance analysis and quadratic utility, which can be thought of as a second-order approximation to the investor's true utility function (Hlawitschka, 1994). Using the setting developed by West, Edison, and Cho (1993) and Fleming, Kirby, and Ostdiek (2001), we aim at measuring the
Finally, we also compute the Sharpe ratio (SR), arguably the most common performance measure used in financial markets. The SR is calculated for each strategy as the ratio of the average realized portfolio excess return to the standard deviation of the portfolio returns.

### D. Transaction Costs

The impact of transaction costs is an essential consideration to evaluate the economic significance of the NXA strategy relative to the RW strategy. A precise determination of the size of transaction costs is generally difficult because it depends on several factors such as the type of investor (for example, individual versus institutional investor), the value of the transaction, and the nature of the broker (say, brokerage firm versus direct Internet trading).

In our analysis, we compute the break-even proportional transaction cost $\tau^{be}$ that renders investors indifferent between two alternative strategies (Han, 2006). We assume that transaction costs equal a fixed proportion $\tau$ of the value traded in each bond: $\tau|w_t - w_{t-1}(R_t/R_{p,t})|$. In comparing the dynamic NXA strategy with the RW strategy, an investor who pays transaction costs lower than $\tau^{be}$ will prefer the NXA strategy. Since $\tau^{be}$ is a proportional cost paid every time the portfolio is rebalanced, we report $\tau^{be}$ in quarterly bps.

### V. Economic Value: The Empirical Evidence

#### A. Core Results

The critical question we address in this section is whether a dynamic strategy conditioning on bilateral measures of U.S. external imbalances outperforms the random walk strategy. We provide an economic evaluation of exchange rate predictability by assessing the performance of dynamically rebalanced portfolios based on the NXA strategy relative to the RW strategy. The analysis is carried out both in sample and out of sample. The in-sample period uses quarterly data from 1973Q1 to 2007Q4 to estimate the predictive regression (6). The out-of-sample analysis uses a twenty-year rolling predictive regression and runs from 1993Q1 through 2007Q4. Notice that to avoid any look-ahead bias, we reestimate $nxat_{it}$ at each point in time using only available information. This ensures that the rolling-window forecasts are always constructed on an information set that is available at the time of the forecast.

The economic evaluation focuses on four criteria: the performance fee $\Phi$, the excess premium return $\Theta$, the SR, and the break-even transaction cost $\tau^{be}$. Each strategy uses a quarterly rebalancing period, three target annualized portfolio volatilities, $\sigma^p = \{8\%, 10\%, 12\%\}$, and a degree of relative risk aversion $\delta = 6$. The estimates of $\Phi$ and $\Theta$ are reported in annualized bps, whereas the estimates of $\tau^{be}$ are given in quarterly bps.

Table 3 presents the economic value results both in sample and out of sample. The in-sample results show that the NXA strategy exhibits high economic value relative to the...
strategy. Consider, for example, the target volatility of \( \sigma_p = 10\% \). The performance fee a U.S. investor is willing to pay for switching from the RW strategy to the NXA strategy is 143 annual bps, whereas the premium return the NXA strategy yields in excess to the RW strategy is 136 annual bps. These results are also reflected in the risk-return trade-off as measured by SR. The NXA strategy delivers an SR of 0.83, larger than 0.70, which is the SR of the RW strategy.

Moreover, the out-of-sample results confirm the high economic value of the NXA strategy. This is a noticeable result, which contrasts with the weak out-of-sample evidence that characterizes the disconnect between exchange rates and fundamentals documented in the literature (Engel et al., 2008).

At the target portfolio volatility of \( \sigma_p = 10\% \), a U.S. investor is willing to pay 230 annual bps for switching from the RW to the NXA strategy, which is comparable to the excess premium return of 199 annual bps. Similarly, the SR increases from 0.78 to 1.00 when the investor uses the NXA strategy rather than the RW strategy.

Finally, if transaction costs are sufficiently high, the fluctuations in the dynamic weights of the NXA strategy would render the strategy too costly to implement relative to the RW strategy. We address this concern by computing the break-even transaction cost \( \tau^{be} \) as the proportional transaction cost that cancels out the positive performance fee of the NXA strategy relative to the RW strategy. An investor who pays a transaction cost lower than \( \tau^{be} \) will continue to prefer a strategy that delivers a positive performance fee. Table 3 reveals that \( \tau^{be} \) is generally high. At the target portfolio volatility of \( \sigma_p = 10\% \), \( \tau^{be} \) is 210 quarterly bps for the in-sample analysis, and 80 quarterly bps for the out-of-sample analysis. This means that the U.S. investor would not switch from the RW strategy to the NXA strategy if he is subject to proportional transaction costs larger than 210 (80) quarterly bps for the in-sample (out-of-sample) analysis. In light of the fact that transaction costs in the FX market are very low and that our exercise allows portfolio rebalancing only once per quarter, it is highly unlikely that transaction costs can offset the positive performance fees from using the NXA strategy.12

Figure 4 offers a visual description of the time variation in the optimal portfolio weights for both the benchmark RW and the NXA strategies. As expected, the weights are very smooth over time for the RW strategy and remain reasonably smooth for the NXA strategy, suggesting that transaction costs should not play a major role.

Overall, both the in-sample and out-of-sample results suggest that the bilateral measures of U.S. external imbalances

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12 Turnover in the portfolio weights is clearly higher in the out-of-sample exercise, judging from the fact that \( \tau^{be} \) reduces from 210 to 80 when moving from in-sample to out-of-sample analysis. Although this is a large change, it is worth noting that even 80 bps constitutes a huge number in this context given that in recent years, the spread on liquid exchange rates was never higher than 5–6 bps and that in the more distant past (or the least liquid periods) it would never have been larger than 20 bps for the major exchange rates examined in this paper (see Aliber, Chowdhry, & Yan, 2003; Akram, Rime, & Sarno, 2008).
The in-sample and out-of-sample performance measures of currency strategies investing in the CAD, EUR, GBP, and JPY relative to the USD when the parameter estimates are bias corrected. NXA is a dynamic investment strategy that exploits the predictive information in the bilateral measure of cyclical imbalances between the United States and Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan to forecast nominal exchange rate returns, respectively. RW is an investment strategy that uses the driftless random walk model to forecast nominal exchange rate returns. Each strategy considers a U.S. investor who dynamically rebalances his wealth every quarter between the domestic bond in USD and four foreign bonds in foreign currencies. The exchange rate forecasts are used to convert the foreign bond returns in USD. The strategy maximizes expected returns subject to a given target volatility \( \sigma^* \approx [8\%, 10\%, 12\%] \). The annualized percentage mean, percentage volatility, and Sharpe ratio of each portfolio are denoted by \( \mu_p, \sigma_p, \) and \( SR_p \), respectively. \( \Phi \) denotes the maximum performance fee a risk-averse investor with quadratic utility and a degree of relative risk aversion \( \delta = 6 \) is willing to pay for switching from RW to NXA strategy. \( \Phi \) measures the excess premium return of NXA relative to RW strategy. \( \Phi \) is the break-even proportional transaction cost, which cancels out the utility advantage of the NXA relative to RW strategy. \( \Phi \) and \( \Theta \) are expressed in annual basis points and \( \tau_{be} \) in quarterly basis points. The bias-corrected parameters are obtained by generating 10,000 time series using the moving blocks bootstrap (Gonçalves & White, 2005). The in-sample analysis covers quarterly data from 1977Q1 to 2007Q4. The out-of-sample analysis uses a rolling window of 20 years and runs from 1993Q1 to 2007Q4.

Table 4.—Economic Value of Bilateral NXA and Small-Sample Bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In sample</th>
<th>RW</th>
<th>NXA</th>
<th>NXA versus RW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of sample</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The in-sample and out-of-sample performance measures of currency strategies investing in the CAD, EUR, GBP, and JPY relative to the USD when the parameter estimates are bias corrected. NXA is a dynamic investment strategy that exploits the predictive information in the bilateral measure of cyclical imbalances between the United States and Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan to forecast nominal exchange rate returns, respectively. RW is an investment strategy that uses the driftless random walk model to forecast nominal exchange rate returns. Each strategy considers a U.S. investor who dynamically rebalances his wealth every quarter between the domestic bond in USD and four foreign bonds in foreign currencies. The exchange rate forecasts are used to convert the foreign bond returns in USD. The strategy maximizes expected returns subject to a given target volatility \( \sigma^* \approx [8\%, 10\%, 12\%] \). The annualized percentage mean, percentage volatility, and Sharpe ratio of each portfolio are denoted by \( \mu_p, \sigma_p, \) and \( SR_p \), respectively. \( \Phi \) denotes the maximum performance fee a risk-averse investor with quadratic utility and a degree of relative risk aversion \( \delta = 6 \) is willing to pay for switching from RW to NXA strategy. \( \Phi \) measures the excess premium return of NXA relative to RW strategy. \( \Phi \) is the break-even proportional transaction cost, which cancels out the utility advantage of the NXA relative to RW strategy. \( \Phi \) and \( \Theta \) are expressed in annual basis points and \( \tau_{be} \) in quarterly basis points. The bias-corrected parameters are obtained by generating 10,000 time series using the moving blocks bootstrap (Gonçalves & White, 2005). The in-sample analysis covers quarterly data from 1977Q1 to 2007Q4. The out-of-sample analysis uses a rolling window of 20 years and runs from 1993Q1 to 2007Q4.

Table 5.—The Economic Value of Global NXA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In sample</th>
<th>RW</th>
<th>NXA</th>
<th>NXA versus RW</th>
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<tr>
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<td>10%</td>
<td>13.1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In-sample and out-of-sample performance measures of currency strategies investing in the CAD, EUR, GBP, and JPY relative to the USD. NXA is a dynamic investment strategy that exploits the predictive information in the global measure of U.S. cyclical imbalances to forecast nominal exchange rate returns. RW is an investment strategy that uses the driftless random walk model to forecast nominal exchange rate returns. Each strategy considers a U.S. investor who dynamically rebalances his wealth every quarter between the domestic bond in USD and four foreign bonds in foreign currencies. The exchange rate forecasts are used to convert the foreign bond returns in USD. The strategy maximizes expected returns subject to a given target volatility \( \sigma^* \approx [8\%, 10\%, 12\%] \). The annualized percentage mean, percentage volatility, and Sharpe ratio of each portfolio are denoted by \( \mu_p, \sigma_p, \) and \( SR_p \), respectively. \( \Phi \) denotes the maximum performance fee a risk-averse investor with quadratic utility and a degree of relative risk aversion \( \delta = 6 \) is willing to pay for switching from RW to NXA strategy. \( \Phi \) measures the excess premium return of NXA relative to RW strategy. \( \Phi \) and \( \Theta \) are expressed in annual basis points and \( \tau_{be} \) in quarterly basis points. The in-sample analysis covers quarterly data from 1977Q1 to 2007Q4. The out-of-sample analysis uses a rolling window of twenty years and runs from 1993Q1 to 2007Q4.

Global versus bilateral nxa. We examine the predictive power of global nxa to assess whether it can replicate or improve the predictive power detected in bilateral nxa, in which case it would be unnecessary to work with our proxies for bilateral external imbalances. In this context, the key reference is Alquist and Chinn (2008), who test the power of U.S. global nxa to forecast three U.S. bilateral exchange rates, showing good in-sample results but poor out-of-sample performance. In table 5 we repeat the same asset allocation exercise as in table 3, with the only difference that we use U.S. global nxa rather than bilateral nxa to predict each of the four bilateral exchange rate returns. The results in table 5 confirm that US global nxa has good in-sample predictive power in terms of economic metrics of evaluation, comparable to the economic value recorded for bilateral nxa in table 3. However, global nxa performs poorly out of sample, being outperformed by the random walk benchmark. These results effectively confirm the evidence in Alquist and Chinn (2008) using economic rather than statistical criteria. For the purposes of this paper, this exercise suggests that the information content in bilateral nxa is more powerful than global nxa in forecasting bilateral exchange rates out of sample.

Base currency. The valuation channel modeled in GR is very much inspired by countries such as the United States,
where the external imbalances are characterized by a substantial mismatch in the currency of denomination of assets and liabilities. This means that while the theory and the valuation channel may be powerful empirically when forecasting the USD, they may be less powerful when considering exchange rates with respect to a different base (or domestic) currency. To address this issue, we use the same predictive regressions and the same asset allocation exercise as in the core results, with the crucial difference that the USD is excluded from the investor’s opportunity set. In other words, the investor can trade only four bonds (rather than five), denominated in CAD, EUR, GBP, and JPY. In addition to excluding the USD from the portfolio, we also allow each of the other currencies left in the portfolio to be the base currency. In brief, this exercise enables us to assess the extent to which the core results are driven by the presence of the USD in the opportunity set of the investor and to the base currency considered. The results in table 6 show that the economic value of bilateral nxa remains high and superior to the random walk benchmark for each base currency considered. This leads us to conclude that the information content of nxa for forecasting exchange rates is not specific to the USD.13

**Trade versus valuation channels.** It is instructive to assess the relative importance of net exports (nx) and net foreign assets (na) in determining the predictive power of bilateral nxa. We carry out the following exercise to shed some light on this issue. We start from noting that bilateral nx is observable since data on bilateral exports and imports are available, whereas na is not available on a bilateral basis. Therefore, defining nxαι.obs( i) ≈ naαι.obs( i) − naαι,t( i), where naαι.obs( i) and naαι,t( i) denote bilateral detrended net exports and net foreign assets, respectively, we calculate naαι.obs( i) as the sum of nxαι.obs( i) and naαι,t( i). We then consider an investment strategy where the forecasts of exchange rate returns are obtained from predictive regressions that use either naαι.obs( i) or naαι.t( i) as the predictive variable and compute the usual economic metrics of evaluation.14

The results are displayed in table 7, alongside the core results for bilateral na given in table 3, to ease the comparison. This exercise reveals that both investment strategies (based either on bilateral na or nx as predictive variables) yield positive performance fees and sizable break-even transaction costs in-sample, although the performance of the investment strategy based on bilateral na performs better than the strategy based on bilateral nx. However, the out-of-sample results suggest that the investment strategy based on bilateral na fails to outperform the random walk benchmark (negative fees), whereas the strategy based on bilateral na continues to perform better than a random walk benchmark. The NXA strategy dominates both strategies (using either bilateral na or nx) by some margin. Taken together, these results suggest that the asset/ liability component is likely to play a more important role than the export/imports component in

13 In fact, note that the performance fees are higher in these NXA portfolios relative to the core results in table 3 even though they are based on a smaller set of assets. The reason is that the benchmark RW strategy performs much worse with the portfolios that exclude the USD, rather than a genuine improvement of the NXA strategy. This can be seen by noting the reduction in Sharpe ratios for the RW strategy in table 6 relative to table 3. In other words, the higher performance fees of the NXA strategy in table 6 reflect an improvement relative to the random walk model, not an absolute improvement in performance.

14 Since na and nx can be correlated, there will not be an exact decomposition of the variance of nx into the variance of na and the variance of nx. As a consequence, conditioning on both na and nx will not account for the covariance term that can play a role when considering nx.
driving the forecasting power of cyclical external imbalances for exchange rates. However, combining the two components into one strategy (the NXA strategy) clearly leads to superior performance.

Data in real time. We are aware that our data are not in real-time; we cannot guarantee that the data used to construct $nxa^{(t)}$ were available in a timely fashion to an investor at time $t$ to generate forecasts of exchange rate returns at time $t+1$ over the sample period. We address this issue by constructing a real-time data set for the raw variables needed to construct $nxa^{(t)}$. In particular, we construct four vintages for each year starting from 1993Q1 and running through the end of the sample at 2007Q4. A description of the real-time data set is given in appendix A. In essence, we replicate, to the extent that this is possible, the conditioning information set available to the investor over the out-of-sample period and follow the same steps of estimation, forecasting, and asset allocation carried out earlier using revised data. The results, reported in table 8, suggest that although the economic value decreases slightly when using real-time data, the NXA strategy continues to outperform the RW strategy by a large margin.

Summing up. The core result that the model conditioning on measures of bilateral external imbalances provides substantial economic value relative to the random walk benchmark appears to be robust. It is enhanced when accounting for small-sample bias in the estimated parameters of the predictive regression and is robust to the choice of the base currency and the use of real-time data. The analysis also shows that it is not possible to replicate these results simply using global $nxa$ as opposed to bilateral $nxa$ and that the asset/liability component is likely to be more important than the exports/imports component in driving our results.

### Table 8. Economic Value of Bilateral NXA in Real Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>RW</th>
<th>NXA</th>
<th>NXA versus RW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\mu_p$</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>$SR_p$</td>
<td>$\Phi$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of sample</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\sigma$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>8%</td>
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<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.0 0.77</td>
<td>15.9 11.8 0.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The out-of-sample performance of currency investment strategies executed using real-time data. The strategies invest in the CAD, EUR, GBP, and JPY relative to the USD using real-time forecasts. As real-time data, we mean i-dated data that were known to investors at time $t$. Similarly, real-time forecasts are i-dated forecasts, which are based on information available to investors at time $t$. $nxa$ is a dynamic investment strategy that exploits the real-time predictive information in the bilateral measure of cyclical imbalances between the United States and Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan to forecast nominal exchange rate returns, respectively. RW is an investment strategy that uses the driftless random walk model to forecast nominal exchange rate returns. Each strategy considers a U.S. investor who dynamically rebalances his wealth every quarter between the domestic bond in USD and four foreign bonds in foreign currencies. The exchange rate forecasts are used to convert the foreign bond returns in USD. The strategy maximizes expected returns subject to a given target volatility $\sigma_p = [8\%, 10\%, 12\%]$. The annualized percentage mean, percentage volatility, and SR of each portfolio are denoted by $\mu_p$, $\sigma_p$, and $SR_p$, respectively. $\Phi$ denotes the maximum performance fee a risk-averse investor with quadratic utility and a degree of relative risk aversion equal to 6 is willing to pay for switching from RW to NXA strategy. $t^{\text{in}}$ measures the excess premium return of NXA relative to RW strategy. $t^{\text{in}}$ is the break-even proportional transaction cost, which cancels out the utility advantage of the NXA relative to RW strategy. $\Phi$ and $t^{\text{in}}$ are expressed in annual basis points, and $t^{\text{in}}$ in quarterly basis points. The out-of-sample analysis uses a rolling window of twenty years and runs from 1993Q1 to 2007Q4. Appendix A presents a description of the real-time data set.

### VI. Conclusions

This paper extends empirically the model proposed by Gourinchas and Rey (2007) to bilateral nominal exchange rates and tests its implications for exchange rate predictability. The evaluation of the model is carried out in terms of economic significance, in a setting where a U.S. investor employs the model for the purpose of allocating capital across countries. We employ economic criteria as it is well known that statistical evidence of exchange rate predictability in itself does not guarantee that an investor can exploit this predictability. Our methodology for measuring economic value is based on a stylized mean-variance framework.

We use, as predictive variables, estimated bilateral measures of cyclical external imbalances that are able to capture the trading and financial relations between the United States and other major countries. Using criteria of economic significance, we find that the bilateral measure of U.S. external imbalances delivers substantial economic gains to an international investor both in sample and out of sample. These results provide sound evidence against the random walk benchmark and are robust to the impact of transaction costs and real-time considerations. This is a promising result in the context of the empirical literature on exchange rate models based on fundamentals, which generally finds a feeble link between exchange rates and economic variables, especially at short horizons.

Overall, the results suggest that nominal exchange rates are determined and predictable by measures of bilateral external imbalances. This seems consistent with the simple intuition that if a country runs a persistent, negative cyclical external imbalance, its currency will depreciate as an integral part of the process of international financial adjustment.

### REFERENCES


Germany

Both revised and real-time seasonally adjusted quarterly data on exports and imports of goods and services are taken from QNA. Revised annual data on foreign assets and liabilities are from Lane and Milesi-Ferretti (2007), while real-time annual vintages for the periods 1993–1996 and 1997–2007 are collected from BOPS and IFS, respectively. Wealth is proxied by household financial wealth. Revised annual data are obtained from the Bundesbank Statistics Division, while real-time annual vintages are from the Bundesbank Monthly Report.

UK

Both revised and real-time seasonally adjusted quarterly data on exports and imports of goods and services are taken from QNA. Revised annual data on foreign assets and liabilities are from Lane and Milesi-Ferretti (2007), while real-time annual data for the periods 1993–1996 and 1997–2007 are collected from BOPS and IFS, respectively. Wealth is proxied by the financial wealth of households and nonprofit institutions serving households. We collect annual and quarterly revised data and real-time quarterly vintages from the UK National Statistics.

Japan

Both revised and real-time seasonally adjusted quarterly data on exports and imports of goods and services are taken from QNA. Revised annual data on foreign assets and liabilities are from Lane and Milesi-Ferretti (2007), while real-time annual data for the periods 1993–1996 and 1997–2007 are collected from BOPS and IFS, respectively. Wealth is proxied by households and nonprofit institutions’ net worth. The Japan Statistical Association provides revised annual data from 1973 to 1984. From the Japan Statistical Yearbook, we collect revised annual data and real-time annual vintages for the periods 1985–1992 and 1993–2007, respectively.

APPENDIX B

Small Sample Bias Correction

The small number of observations might cause bias in the parameter estimates. To take into account this effect, we consider the moving blocks bootstrap (Hall, Horowitz, & Jing, 1995; Politis & White, 2004; Gonçalves & White, 2005). Let y_t be the dependent variable and x_{t-1} the predictive variable. We obtain bias-corrected parameter estimates as follows:

1. Run the predictive regression \( y_t = \alpha + \beta x_{t-1} + \epsilon_t \) and estimate \( \hat{\alpha} \) and \( \hat{\beta} \) by least squares.
2. Form an artificial sample \( S^*_t = (y^*_t, x^*_t) \) by randomly sampling, with replacement, \( b \) overlapping blocks of length \( l \) from the sample \( S_t = (y_t, x_{t-1}) \).
3. Run the predictive regression \( y^*_t = \alpha^* + \beta^* x^*_{t-1} + \epsilon^*_t \) by least squares and obtain the estimates \( \hat{\alpha}^* \) and \( \hat{\beta}^* \).
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3, 10,000 times and compute the bias-corrected estimates as the difference between twice the estimates of \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \) and the average estimates of \( \alpha^* \) and \( \beta^* \), respectively.\(^{15}\)

\[ \hat{\alpha}_{BC} = \hat{\alpha} - [E(\hat{\alpha}^*) - \hat{\alpha}], \quad \text{and} \quad \hat{\beta}_{BC} = \hat{\beta} - [E(\hat{\beta}^*) - \hat{\beta}], \]

\(^{15}\)Specifically, bias-corrected estimates are given by

\( \hat{\alpha}_{BC} = \frac{2\hat{\alpha} - E(\hat{\alpha}^*) - \hat{\alpha}}{2} \) and \( \hat{\beta}_{BC} = \frac{2\hat{\beta} - E(\hat{\beta}^*) - \hat{\beta}}{2} \), respectively.