

Trump may talk on US return to TPP

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US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Tuesday he had "begun to have very high-level conversations" on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and rejoining the regional trade pact is an option for US President Donald Trump.

Trump repeatedly attacked the TPP deal on the campaign trail and pulled the US out of it soon after he took over. However, last month he expressed openness to rejoining if the terms were improved. Mnuchin told the US Chamber of Commerce in Washington

that this was significant. "He's willing to negotiate," Mnuchin said. "Whether we do multilaterals or we consider going back into TPP, again that's something that's on the table."

Japan has spearheaded a drive to keep the pact alive among the remaining 11 members, and the resulting agreement is set to be signed on March 8. Mnuchin said the US would focus on bilateral deals first before reviewing its stance on the TPP.

"It's not a priority at the moment, but it is something the president will consider," he added. Japan has repeatedly said it's not interested in renegotiation, and any such request would

probably not be welcomed by other nations. The US should rejoin the treaty as it is, President Michelle Bachelet of Chile told the *Nikkei* newspaper in an interview this week. Bachelet will host the signing ceremony for the treaty in March. Still, Japan's former TPP Minister Akira Amari said in an interview Tuesday that it might be feasible to add new clauses on topics not currently covered if US concerns cannot be addressed outside the TPP framework.

He warned that by spurning the agreement, the US risks allowing China to make global rules on trade and investment.

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