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U.S.-China Tariff Actions Since 2018: An Overview

Since 2018, the U.S. government has imposed a series of tariffs on imports from the People’s Republic of China (PRC, or China) with the stated intention of addressing U.S. concerns about PRC trade practices and foreign policies. Since 2025, the Trump Administration’s trade policy and tariff actions have maintained a focus on China among other countries. Some actions explicitly target China; others involve sectors that affect China (**Figure 1**). China has responded to U.S. tariffs with its own tariffs and market restrictions. Given the trade imbalance (China exports to the United States more than four times what it imports), China has fewer goods on which to raise tariffs. In that context, China has focused its tariffs on top U.S. exports and turned to nontariff measures. It has canceled orders, implemented export controls on some production inputs, and imposed market restrictions on some U.S. firms. Both sides have exempted some products from tariffs.

On February 20, 2026, the Supreme Court ruled that the President cannot use the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA, 50 U.S.C. §§1701 et seq.) to impose tariffs, affecting some tariffs the United States imposed on China in 2025 (see “IEEPA (2025-2026)”). U.S. and PRC officials have been in talks since 2025 but have not reached a tariff deal. Members of Congress may consider whether to support, modify, or oppose the Administration’s approach to tariffs; sustain, expand, or pull back trade authorities Congress delegated to the President; and require approval by Congress for trade deals that result in tariff changes. See CRS In Focus IF11284, *U.S.-China Trade Relations*; CRS In Focus IF12125, *Section 301 and China: The U.S.-China Phase One Trade Deal*; CRS In Focus IF12958, *Section 301 and China: Mature-Node Semiconductors*; and CRS In Focus IF12666, *Section 301 and China: Shipping and Shipbuilding Issues*.

Escalating Tariff Rates

As of February 20, 2026, U.S. and PRC average tariff rates on the other country’s goods were about 34% (U.S.) and 31% (PRC), not accounting for exemptions and Section 232 actions, and rates weighted for trade flows (**Table 1**).

Table 1. U.S.-China Two-Way Average Tariffs (%)

| | 2017 | 2023 | 2025 | | | | 2026 |
|-------------|------|------|------|-------------|-----|------|------|
| | | | Mar. | April | May | Nov. | |
| U.S. | 2.7 | 19 | 39 | 73 then 164 | 49 | 39 | 34 |
| PRC | 8 | 21 | 21 | 55 then 146 | 31 | 31 | 31 |

Source: CRS with data from multiple sources.

Note: Approximate values; does not account for tariff exemptions.

After two-way tariff rates reached a high of 164% (U.S.) and 146% (PRC) in mid-April 2025, average rates fell to 49% (U.S.) and 31% (PRC) in May and August 2025, when both sides reduced “reciprocal tariffs” to 10% for 90 days. In November 2025, U.S. average tariff rates on China fell to 39% when the United States reduced the fentanyl tariff to

10% and both sides extended their tariff truce for one year. In 2023, the average U.S. tariff rate on China rose to about 19% with tariffs imposed under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 and Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 (19 U.S.C. §2411 and §1862 as amended). China’s average tariff rate on U.S. goods was about 21% by 2023 as it responded with counter-tariffs. Most U.S. and PRC tariff actions are cumulative.

U.S. Tariff Actions and PRC Responses

Section 301 (2018, 2024, 2025)

Authority: *Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. §2411). Addresses unfair trade barriers.*

Industrial Policies: In 2018, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) found that China engaged in forced technology transfer, cyber-enabled theft of U.S. intellectual property and trade secrets, discriminatory and nonmarket licensing practices, and state-funded strategic acquisitions of U.S. assets. USTR imposed tariffs at rates from 7.5% to 25% on about \$370 billion worth of U.S. imports from China. China countered with tariffs on \$110 billion worth of U.S. trade. Most tariffs remain in effect with some exclusions.

In 2020, the United States and China signed what both sides called a Phase One trade deal. It addressed some but did not resolve many of the issues USTR had raised. As part of the deal, China agreed to purchase during 2020 and 2021 at least \$200 billion of goods above a 2017 baseline amount of U.S. agriculture (+\$32 billion), energy (+\$52.4 billion), manufactured goods (+\$77.7 billion), and services (+\$37.9 billion). As of 2021, China fell short of its commitments by 60%, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

In May 2024, USTR extended most 2018 tariffs and raised tariffs by an additional 25% to 100% on some goods (e.g., electric vehicles/batteries, medical products, ship-to-shore cranes, semiconductors, solar cells, steel, and aluminum). In October 2025, USTR initiated an investigation of China’s implementation of the 2020 Phase One deal. In November 2025, USTR extended certain tariff exclusions for one year.

Semiconductors: In December 2025, USTR determined PRC policies and practices on mature-node chips and silicon carbide substrates/wafers to be “actionable” and proposed an initial 0% tariff rate until June 2027.

Shipping/Shipbuilding: In 2025, USTR determined PRC practices to be “actionable” and proposed port equipment tariffs and fees for using PRC-built ships. China retaliated with similar measures. In November 2025, both sides halted such actions for one year.

Section 232 (2018, 2025-2026)

Authority: *Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 (19 U.S.C. §1862, as amended). National security effects of U.S. imports. Investigations precede decisions on tariffs.*

The actions are taken on global imports. Some countries negotiated lower rates as part of tariff trade agreements.

Steel and Aluminum: In 2018, then-President Trump imposed tariffs on most steel (25%) and aluminum (10%) imports to address PRC practices distorting global markets. China retaliated by raising tariffs on aluminum waste/scrap (49%) and pork, fruits, and nuts (20%). In March 2025, President Trump raised aluminum tariffs to 25%, expanded the scope of products, and ended country exemptions. In June 2025, he raised steel and aluminum tariffs to 50%. China is the 2nd-largest U.S. aluminum supplier.

Cars, Light Trucks, and Parts: In March 2025, President Trump imposed a 25% tariff with some offsets. China is the 3rd-largest U.S. supplier of auto parts.

Copper: In July 2025, President Trump imposed a 50% tariff on semfinished copper. China is the 9th-largest U.S. source of copper/copper items.

Semiconductors, Equipment, and Derivative Products: In January 2026, President Trump imposed a 25% tariff on advanced chips with most imports exempted. China makes about 30% of the world’s mature-node semiconductors.

Heavy Trucks and Parts: In November 2025, President Trump imposed a 25% tariff (and a 10% tariff on buses). China is a top U.S. source of industrial trailers and buses.

Critical Minerals: In January 2026, President Trump directed negotiations with other countries in lieu of tariffs. China controls a large share of global processing.

Ongoing Section 232 investigations (initiation date):

- **Pharmaceuticals and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API)** (April 2025). An estimated 80% of global drug production depends on API from China.
- **Aircraft, Jet Engines, Parts** (May 2025). China is the 9th-largest U.S. source for such items.
- **Drones** (July 2025). China is the 2nd-largest U.S. source for these items.
- **Polysilicon** (July 2025). China is the 6th-largest U.S. source for these items. Between 2018 and 2025, the United States imposed tariff-rate quotas on crystalline solar photovoltaic cells and modules under Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. §2251).
- **Wind Turbines** (August 2025). China is the 3rd-largest U.S. source of turbine blades.
- **Medical Supplies, Equipment** (Sept. 2025). China is among the top 8 U.S. suppliers for some items.
- **Robotics and Industrial Machinery:** (Sept. 2025) China is in the top 7 U.S. suppliers of industrial robots.

IEEPA (2025-2026)

Authority: *International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA, 50 U.S.C. §§1701 et seq.). Emergency national security threats.*

On February 20, 2026, the Supreme Court ruled that the President cannot use the IEEPA to impose tariffs. President Trump lifted such tariffs and imposed a 10% global tariff for 150 days under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. § 2132). The de minimis trade action is in effect.

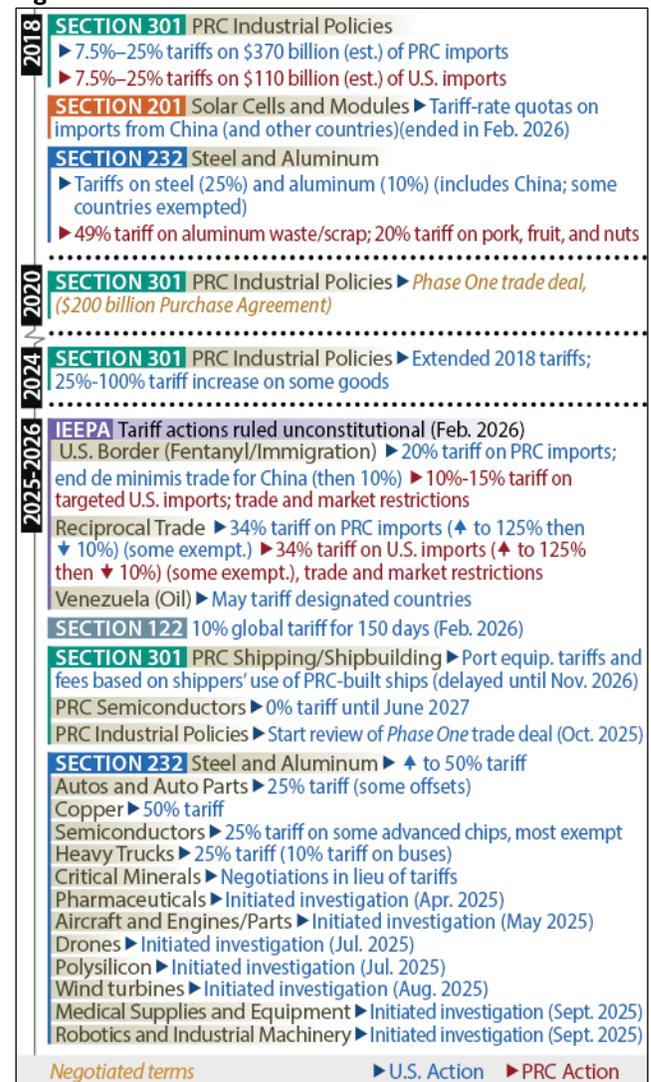
U.S. Border (Immigration, Fentanyl): In February 2025, President Trump announced a 10% tariff (raised to 20% in March 2025 and lowered to 10% in November 2025) on U.S. imports from China and ended de minimis treatment (an exemption of tariffs, fees, and taxes for goods valued at \$800 or less), after declaring China had not taken decisive

actions to address its role in fentanyl and synthetic opioids trade. China retaliated with 10%-15% tariffs on U.S. autos, agricultural machinery, coal, and natural gas; targeted U.S. firms in some antitrust actions and market restrictions; and imposed export controls on chemicals.

Trade Deficit: In April 2025, President Trump announced a 34% tariff on U.S. imports from China. China met U.S. tariffs; a two-way escalation raised tariffs to 125% with some exceptions. China restricted rare earth exports, initiated antidumping and antitrust actions, delayed some purchases of U.S. agriculture and aircraft, and listed some U.S. firms as “unreliable” and subject to export and market restrictions. In May 2025, both sides reduced the rate to 10% for 90 days (extended in November 2025 for a year). China agreed to lift some nontariff retaliatory actions.

Venezuela: In March 2025, President Trump authorized the Secretary of State to designate and subject countries, including China, that import Venezuela’s oil to 25% tariffs.

Figure 1. U.S.-PRC Tariff Actions Since 2018*



Source: CRS, based on public reporting.

Note: Some PRC tariff and nontariff actions are not included.

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