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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 that China exports to the United States over 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 key production inputs, and imposed market restrictions on some U.S. firms. Both sides have exempted some products from tariffs. Most U.S. and PRC tariff actions are cumulative.

U.S. and PRC officials have been in talks since 2025 but have not reached a deal. In fall 2025, both sides agreed to pause some tariff and export control actions for a year; some say PRC follow-through has been uneven. In May 2026, the two sides created trade and investment boards to identify tariffs to be lifted and areas for PRC investment in the U.S. market. Members of Congress may support, modify, or oppose the Administration's approach to tariffs; sustain, expand, or pull back trade authorities Congress delegated to the President; or require approval by Congress for trade deals that result in tariff changes.

Escalating Tariff Rates

By 2019, the average U.S. tariff rate on goods from 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 rose to about 21% as the PRC enacted counter-tariffs. (**Table 1**).

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

			2025				2026	
	2017	2019	Mar.	April	May	Nov.	Feb.	July
U.S.	2.7	19	39	73 then 164	49	39	34	36.5
PRC	8	21	21	55 then 146	31	31	31	31

Source: CRS with data from multiple sources.

Note: Approximate values do not account for exemptions, Section 232/Section 301 sectoral actions, and rates weighted for trade flows.

In March 2025, tariffs rose to 39% (U.S.) and 21% (PRC) and then to 164% (U.S.) and 146% (PRC) in April 2025, with U.S. tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA; 50 U.S.C. §§1701 et seq.) and PRC counter-tariffs. Average rates fell to 49% (U.S.) and 31% (PRC) in May and August 2025, when both sides reduced "reciprocal" IEEPA tariffs to 10% for 90 days. In November 2025, U.S. average tariff rates on China fell to 39% when the United States reduced one IEEPA tariff to 10% and both sides extended a tariff truce for a year. In February 2026, U.S. rates on China fell to 34% after the United States lifted IEEPA tariffs and imposed a 10% tariff for 150 days under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. §2132). As of July 2026, average tariff rates on the other country's goods were about 36.5% (U.S.) and 31% (PRC), after the Section 122 tariff expired and a 12.5% tariff was imposed under Section 301.

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 7.5% to 25% rates 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 2024, USTR extended most 2018 tariffs and raised tariffs by another 25% to 100% on some goods. In 2025, USTR initiated an investigation of China's implementation of the *Phase One* deal and extended some exclusions for one year.

Semiconductors: In 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 port fees for using PRC-built ships. China retaliated with similar measures. In November 2025, both sides halted actions for one year.

Structural Excess Capacity: In March 2026, USTR initiated an investigation into excess manufacturing capacity/production in the PRC and other economies.

Forced Labor: In July 2026, USTR imposed a 12.5% tariff on PRC goods (with some exemptions) for failing to prohibit imports made with forced labor.

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* *imports. Some countries and firms investing in the United States have negotiated lower rates.*

Steel and Aluminum: In 2018, 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, fruit, 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 semifinished copper. China is the 9th-largest U.S. source of copper/copper items.

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.

Lumber and Products: In October 2025, President Trump imposed tariffs on softwood lumber (10%), upholstered furniture (30%), and cabinets (50%). China is the 10th-, 2nd-, and 4th-largest U.S. source of these items, respectively.

Semiconductors: In January 2026, President Trump imposed a 25% tariff on advanced chips (most imports are exempt). China makes about 30% of the world's mature-node semiconductors.

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

Pharmaceuticals and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API): In April 2026, President Trump imposed a 100% ad valorem duty on patented pharmaceuticals and API. About 80% of global drug production relies on API from China.

Aircraft, Jet Engines, Parts: In July 2026, President Trump directed negotiations with other countries. China is the 9th-largest U.S. source for such items.

Polysilicon: In August 2026, President Trump imposed a 15% ad valorem duty and extra tariffs on polysilicon and certain derivative products. China is the 6th-largest U.S. source for these items. U.S. tariff-rate quotas on certain solar cells/modules were in place from 2018 to 2025 under Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. §2251).

Ongoing Section 232 Investigations (initiation date):

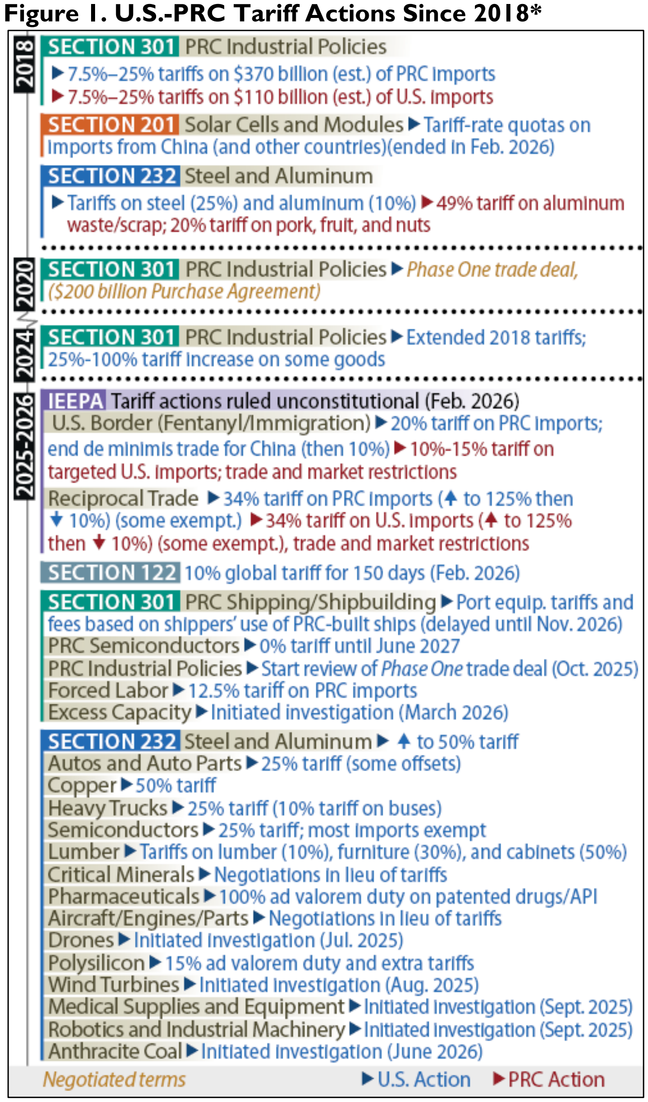
- **Drones** (July 2025). China is the 2nd-largest U.S. source for drones.
- **Wind Turbines** (August 2025). China is the 3rd-largest U.S. source of turbine blades.
- **Medical Supplies, Equipment** (Sept. 2025). China is among the top 8 U.S. suppliers for some items.
- **Robotics and Industrial Machinery** (Sept. 2025). China is in the top 7 U.S. suppliers of industrial robots.
- **Anthracite Coal** (June 2026). China is the 3rd-largest U.S. source of anthracite coal.

IEEPA (2025-2026) (Ruled Unconstitutional)

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

In February 2026, President Trump lifted tariffs he had imposed under IEEPA after the Supreme Court ruled them to be unconstitutional. In February 2025, President Trump had announced a 10% tariff (raised to 20% in March 2025 and lowered to 10% in November 2025) on imports from China and ended *de minimis* treatment (an exemption for goods valued at $800 or less), declaring China had not addressed its role in fentanyl and synthetic opioids trade. China retaliated with 10%-15% tariffs on U.S. autos, machinery, coal, and natural gas; targeted U.S. firms in some antitrust actions and market restrictions; and imposed export controls on chemicals. In April 2025, President Trump announced a 34% tariff on imports from China due to trade deficit concerns. 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 purchases of U.S. aircraft and agriculture, and subjected some U.S. firms 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 rescind some nontariff actions.

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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