May 8, 2025

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 January 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 U.S. trade with China. The PRC 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. China has focused its tariffs on top U.S. exports and also canceled orders, implemented export controls on some inputs for manufacturing, and imposed market restrictions on some U.S. firms. Both sides have exempted some products from tariffs. Members of Congress may consider whether to support, modify, or oppose the Administration's approach to tariffs. Members may consider whether to sustain, expand, or pull back trade authorities Congress has delegated to the President. Members may also assess whether to require Congress's approval for trade negotiations or deals that result in tariff changes.

Escalating Tariff Rates

As of mid-April 2025, U.S. and PRC average tariff rates on the other country's goods were about 164% and 146%, respectively (not accounting for tariff exemptions). This is a sharp rise from 2017 before tariff increases started. Most U.S. tariff actions on China are cumulative (**Table 1**).

- **U.S. tariffs:** In 2017, the average U.S. tariff rate on PRC goods was about 2.7%. By 2023, the average rate was 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). On April 2, 2025, the rate rose to about 73%, after the United States raised tariffs on China by 20% and 34% (see IEEPA section). By mid-April 2025, the average rate rose to about 164% after additional tariff actions with some key exemptions for top U.S. imports).
- **PRC tariffs:** In 2017, China's average tariff rate on U.S. goods was about 8%. The rate rose to about 21% by 2023 after the PRC imposed counter tariffs. The rate rose to about 55% on April 2, 2025 and 146% in mid-April as the PRC met U.S. tariffs.

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

	2017	2023	March 2025	April 2, 2025	April 15, 2025
U.S.	2.7	19	39	73	164
PRC	8	21	21	55	146

Source: CRS with data from multiple sources.

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

Scope of Trade

In 2024, China was the fourth-largest U.S. goods trading partner (total trade was $582.5 billion), the fourth-largest U.S. export market ($143.5 billion), and the third-largest source of U.S. imports ($438.9 billion). In 2024, the U.S. trade deficit with China was $295.4 billion. China is a top U.S. export market for aircraft, agriculture, semiconductor chips/equipment, gas turbines, and medical devices, and a top source of U.S. consumer goods and production inputs.

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 the PRC 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.

In 2020, the United States and the PRC signed what both sides referred to as a *Phase One* trade deal. It addressed some but did not resolve many of the issues USTR had raised. The deal also sought to address the U.S. trade deficit with China with a purchasing 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. At his confirmation hearing in January 2025, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said he would push to enforce the PRC's purchase commitments.

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).

Semiconductors: In December 2024, USTR initiated an investigation on PRC policies in mature-node chips and their effects on critical industries, and silicon carbide substrates/wafers used in chip production.

Shipping/Shipbuilding: In 2025, USTR determined PRC practices to be "actionable" and proposed port equipment tariffs and fees based on shippers' use of PRC-built ships.

Section 201: Solar (2018)

Authority: *Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. §2251). Protect U.S. industry against import surges.*

In 2018, the United States imposed tariff-rate quotas on imports of crystalline solar photovoltaic (CSPV) cells and modules (including from China) to counter a surge of imports and subsidies. Imports above the first 5 gigawatts of CSPV cells each year from all countries are subject to a 14% tariff until February 2026.

Section 232 (2018, 2025)

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

Steel and Aluminum: In 2018, then-President Trump imposed tariffs on most steel (25%) and aluminum (10%) imports, including from China, to address global excess capacity and related trade practices. China retaliated by raising tariffs on aluminum waste and scrap (49%) and on pork, fruits, and nuts (20%). In March 2025, President Trump raised aluminum tariffs to 25%, expanded the scope of products, and ended previous country exemptions. In 2024, China was the top U.S. source of steel items and the second-largest source of aluminum after Canada.

Automobiles and Automobile Parts: In March 2025, President Trump announced 25% tariffs on imports of cars, light trucks, and automobile parts, with some offsets for parts used for U.S. production of finished vehicles. China was the third-largest U.S. supplier of auto parts in 2024.

Copper: In March 2025, President Trump initiated an investigation of all copper imports. China was the seventh-largest U.S. source of copper/copper items in 2024.

Semiconductors: In April 2025, President Trump initiated an investigation of all imports of semiconductors and equipment, and derivative products. China's share of global production rose from 18% in 2020 to 31.5% in 2023.

Pharmaceuticals: In April 2025, President Trump initiated an investigation of all imports of pharmaceuticals and active pharmaceutical ingredients (API). An estimated 80% of global drug production depends on API from China.

Critical Minerals: In April 2025, President Trump opened an investigation of all imports of critical minerals. China controls a large share of global processing (e.g., rare earth elements [90%], nickel [75%], copper [40%]).

Trucks: In April 2025, President Trump opened an investigation of all imports of heavy trucks. China is a top source of trailers and work trucks for factories/warehouses.

IEEPA (2025)

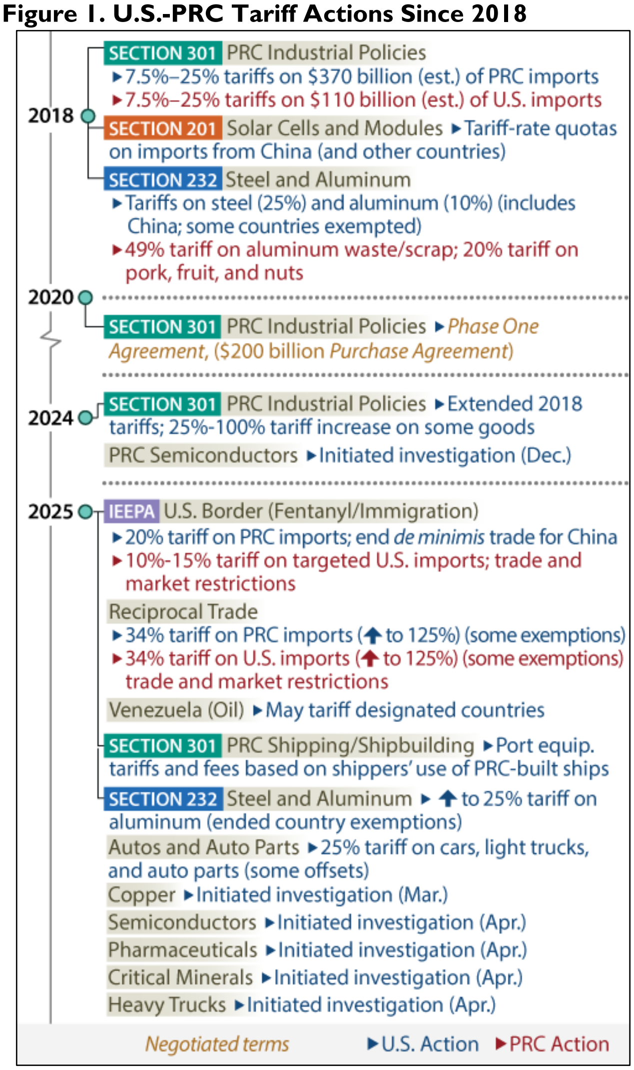
***Authority:** International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA, 50 U.S.C. §§ 1701 et seq.). Emergency national security threats.*

U.S. Border (Immigration, Fentanyl): In February 2025, President Trump announced a 10% tariff (raised to 20% in March 2025) on all 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 the PRC had not taken decisive actions to address its role in fentanyl and synthetic opioids trade. The PRC retaliated with 10%-15% tariffs on U.S. autos, agricultural machinery, coal, and liquefied natural gas. Around this time, the PRC also launched an antitrust investigation of U.S.-based Google. It also imposed market restrictions on U.S.-based Illumina and export controls on some chemicals.

Trade Deficit, Reciprocity: In April 2025, President Trump announced a 34% "reciprocal tariff" on U.S. imports from China in response to the "large and persistent" U.S. trade deficit as part of U.S. global tariff actions. The PRC retaliated with a 34% tariff on U.S. goods, after which the United States raised the tariff to 84%. The PRC matched the 84% tariff, and the United States then raised its rate to 125%, which the PRC also met. The United States did not delay implementation of the reciprocal tariff for China as it did for other countries. The United States exempted (1) top imports from China (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, computer parts/monitors, medicines) and (2) goods subject to Section 232 investigations and actions. Media reports say the PRC has exempted some strategic imports from tariffs (e.g., certain types of semiconductors), while it imposed export controls on rare earths, initiated antidumping and antitrust actions on some U.S. firms, canceled airplane deliveries, delayed U.S. agricultural purchases, and added some U.S. firms to export control and "unreliable entity" lists.

Countries that Import Oil from Venezuela: In March 2025, President Trump announced that the Secretary of State may designate and subject countries to 25% tariffs if they import oil from Venezuela, with the stated purpose of countering the threat posed by the Nicolás Maduro regime and the Tren de Aragua gang. China was the second-largest importer of oil from Venezuela in 2024, after the United States. In 2025, President Trump revoked Chevron's license to export oil from Venezuela to the United States.

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



Source: CRS, based on public reporting.

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