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Trump's Tariffs on Copper, Steel, and Aluminum Reflect Broader Economic Strategy

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President Donald Trump's decision to impose steep tariffs on copper, steel, and aluminum imports underscores a key aspect of his "Make America Great Again" platform:

reviving core U.S. industries and strengthening economic self-reliance. The 50 percent tariffs, which apply broadly to imports of finished metal products, are intended not only as economic measures but as a signal of commitment to restoring America's industrial base.

The tariffs mirror Trump's long-held view that metals like steel and aluminum are vital to national security and economic independence. "Steel is steel. You don't have steel, you don't have a country," Trump declared during his first term, linking industrial output directly to national resilience. At that time, he argued that decades of unfair foreign trade practices had hollowed out U.S. manufacturing, leading to plant closures and job losses, particularly in blue-collar communities.

The United States was once the global leader in copper, steel, and aluminum production. But over the decades, leadership shifted abroad to Chile for copper, and to China for both steel and aluminum. David Stritch, senior foreign exchange analyst at Caxton, told *Euronews* that Trump's tariffs are "primarily a political motivation" aimed at reversing this long-term trend.

On Wednesday, copper futures fell sharply ahead of the August 1 tariff deadline. Prices dropped over 20 percent to roughly $4.55 per pound after the Trump administration announced an exemption for raw copper materials, including concentrates and cathodes. However, processed imports such as copper wire, pipes, and sheeting remain subject to the full tariff.

The move to double existing steel and aluminum tariffs from 25 percent to 50 percent has already increased domestic metal prices. While this shields U.S. producers from cheaper imports, it creates added costs for manufacturers that rely on competitively priced raw materials. As a result, companies are re-evaluating supply chains and weighing the costs of reshoring production.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of tariffs in revitalizing U.S. production remains uncertain. Steel output in 2024 was 1 percent lower than in 2017, before Trump's first round of tariffs. U.S. aluminum production dropped nearly 10 percent in the same period.

Meanwhile, a recent analysis estimated that these tariffs could increase manufacturing costs by up to 4.5 percent, particularly affecting tight-margin industries such as electric vehicles (EVs) and household appliances.

Stritch noted that industries most reliant on copper, steel, and aluminum, including construction, defense, and renewable energy, face the sharpest cost pressures. Sectors like EVs, which depend heavily on these metals and already operate on slim 5 percent margins, may be hit hardest.

These policies reflect Trump's broader economic vision: restoring domestic industry, protecting American workers, and challenging the global supply chains that have dominated since the late 20th century.