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Trump Escalates Global Tariff Campaign in Strategic Trade Shake-Up

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In a series of sweeping moves, former U.S. President Donald Trump aggressively expanded his tariff policies throughout 2025, targeting a wide range of imports as part of a renewed America-first trade agenda. The evolving measures have sent ripples through international markets and placed pressure on foreign governments to renegotiate bilateral terms more favorable to U.S. interests.

Beginning February 1, Trump imposed 25% tariffs on imports from Mexico and most Canadian goods, and 10% duties on Chinese products. The action was linked to demands

that those countries address the flow of fentanyl and illegal immigration into the United States. Just two days later, a 30-day suspension was granted to Canada and Mexico in exchange for commitments on border and crime enforcement, though no such pause was extended to China.

By February 10, the administration moved forward with a blanket 25% tariff on steel and aluminum, eliminating all prior exemptions. Further hikes followed on March 3, with new 25% tariffs on Mexican and Canadian imports going into effect the next day, along with a doubling of tariffs on Chinese goods connected to fentanyl to 20%.

On March 6, Canada and Mexico were given a one-month exemption through a regional trade pact. But soon after, on March 26, Trump launched a 25% tariff on imported cars and light trucks, signaling a broadening of trade penalties.

April marked a particularly aggressive phase. Trump unveiled a global 10% tariff baseline, sparking turmoil across international financial markets. Though he paused certain country-specific measures after the initial shock erased trillions in market value, the overall 10% duty remained in place. On April 9, he vowed to increase tariffs on Chinese goods to 125%, pushing the total duties on those imports to 145% when prior penalties were included.

By May 9, Trump had reached a limited bilateral agreement with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, keeping 10% tariffs on British exports while reducing duties on U.S. car exports to the United Kingdom. Just days later, on May 12, a temporary trade truce was achieved with China, slashing the U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports to 30% and China's reciprocal tariffs to 10%. This was followed by a May 13 move to reduce the de minimis tariff rate, a low-value import threshold for Chinese goods under \$800, from 120% to 54%.

The tension with Europe intensified on May 23 when Trump floated a 50% tariff on goods from the European Union (EU), only to retract it two days later. That same week, he warned that Apple Inc. would face a 25% levy if its phones were produced outside the United States.

Legal developments followed on May 29, when a federal appeals court reinstated Trump's broadest tariff measure, temporarily halting a lower court's ruling. On June 3, an executive proclamation doubled tariffs on steel and aluminum to 50%.

Trade action continued throughout July. On July 3, Trump announced a 20% tariff on Vietnamese exports and a 40% rate on goods routed through Vietnam from third countries. Days later, he used Truth Social to warn that countries siding with BRICS, an economic bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, would face an extra 10% tariff.

On July 7, Trump revealed that all higher tariffs previously announced would take effect on August 1. Letters sent to 14 countries, including Japan, South Korea, and Serbia, confirmed new tariff levels ranging from 25% to 40%. Shortly after, he declared plans to raise tariffs on Canadian imports to 35%, while imposing blanket duties of 15% to 20% on most other trade partners.

Mexico and the EU were once again targeted on July 12, as Trump floated a 30% tariff set to begin in August. By July 15, a new agreement with Indonesia introduced a 19% tariff. Diplomatic progress followed on July 22, when a trade deal with Japan cut auto import duties to 15%.

Finally, on July 27, the U.S. reached a tariff agreement with the EU, imposing a 15% import duty on most goods. One day later, Trump warned that countries failing to strike individual deals with the U.S. would soon face standard tariffs between 15% and 20%.

While critics argue these policies risk igniting broader economic tensions, Trump's allies claim the approach forces global powers to respect U.S. sovereignty and contributes to restoring domestic manufacturing strength. The long-term effects of these measures remain to be seen, but their immediate impact has been undeniably global.