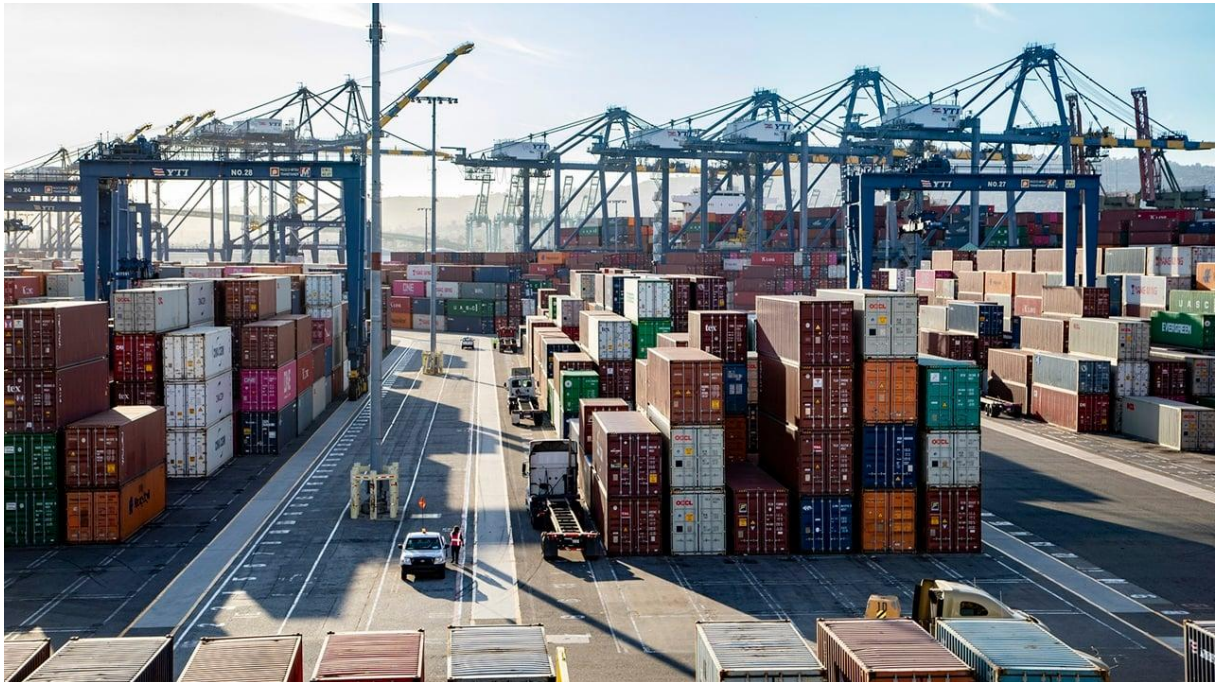


Trump's China tariffs fail to make an impact

The latest data shows that President Trump's tariff regime dating back to 2018, primarily on Chinese goods up to now, is having little effect on trade.

[Nick Savvides](#), Europe correspondent

February 5, 2025



Credit: Port of Los Angeles

Chinese import volumes have remained strong and there has been rising congestion at both ports in [China](#) and the [US](#) and the expectation remains that this is not about to change.

The imposition of 10% tariffs on all Chinese imports into the US was, according to the BBC's Ross Atkins, an attempt to prevent US consumers being "ripped off by the rest of the world", and for America to be self-reliant.

It is questionable whether tariffs of 25% already in place since 2018 have had any impact, with the latest port congestion data showing that delays are occurring in China and the US.

Beacon CEO Fraser Robinson told *Seatrade Maritime News*: "In the build up to lunar new year, average vessel anchor times surged beyond December levels at a number of major Chinese ports including [Shanghai](#) (+8 hours); Zhoushan (+9 hours); and Yantian (+3 hours). Shanghai appears to have struggled the most, with average anchor times nearing 21 hours in January."

US east coast ports saw deteriorating conditions to start the year recording a similar trend with Charleston (+16 hours); Savannah (+12 hours) and Norfolk at 24 hours.

"While increased congestion ahead of the lunar new year is not particularly unusual, the added pressure associated with the threat of tariffs from the Trump administration and the looming possibility of a resumption of services through the Suez Canal means shippers may well be in for yet another year of unpredictability when it comes to container shipping."

Related: [Trump's Mexico and Canada tariffs – what's at stake for shipping?](#)

Initial tariffs of 25% were initially introduced on an increasing number of imported goods from China, mainly from mid-2018 onwards, according to the Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), while in January 2020 China and the US signed a document outlining future trade between the countries.

However, PIIE noted: “China was not able to live up to the commitment of purchasing an additional \$200 billion of US goods and services over 2020 and 2021.” In fact China had managed to import just 58% of the goods agreed to in what Trump called “a historical trade deal”.

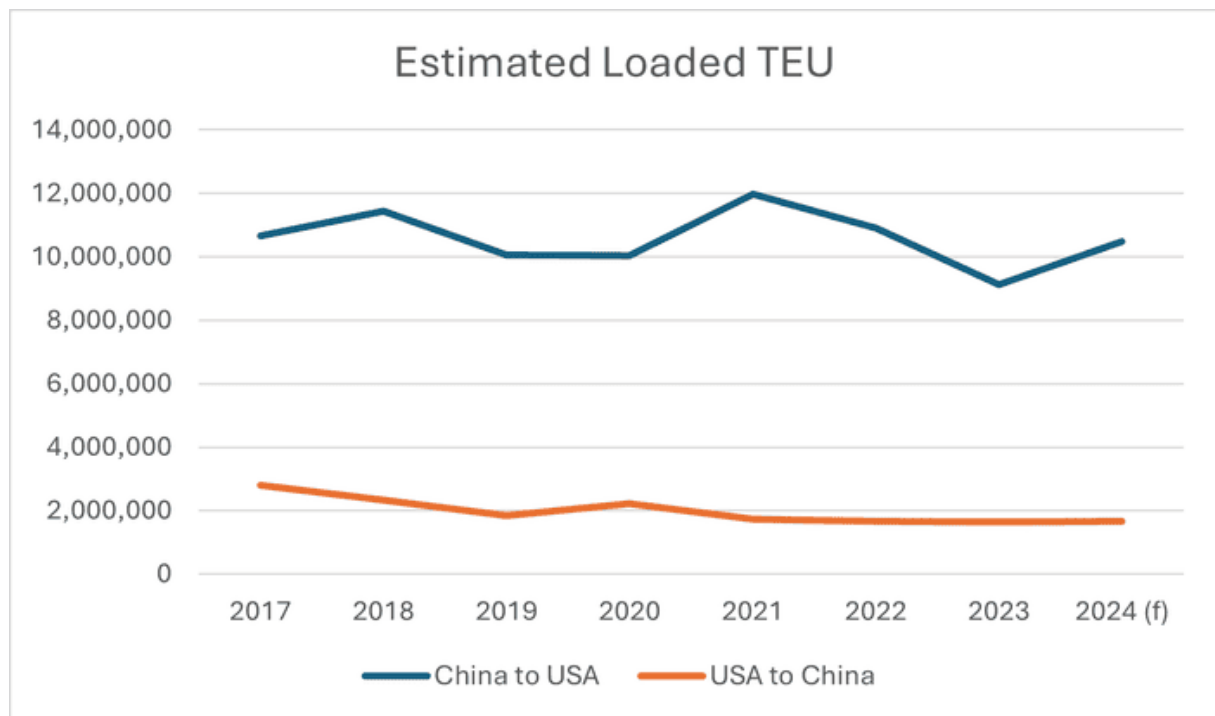
MDS Transmodal analyst Antonella Teodoro pointed out that trade flows from China to the US has been consistently much higher than the reverse, reflecting a long-standing trade imbalance.

“In 2017, China shipped nearly four times as many teu to the USA as the USA sent to China, and this trend has remained stable over the years,” commented Teodoro.

US imports from China reached nearly 12 million teu in 2021, potentially due to post-pandemic recovery and high demand, while US exports to China were just 1.73 million teu in 2021, falling further to 1.65 million teu the following year.

Related: [Are Panama and Trump on a collision course over the Canal?](#)

“The trade war (2018-2019) and pandemic disruptions (2020-2021) significantly affected [trade] flows. The decline in US exports suggests weaker demand for US goods in China or supply chain shifts. 2024 forecasts indicate a slight recovery in China-to-USA trade, but US exports remain weak,” according to Teodoro.



Graphs: Courtesy of MDS Transmodal

Overall US imports in 2017, before tariffs were introduced in mid-2018, were 10.6 million teu, by 2024, imports had declined slightly to 10.4 million teu. US exports to China ahead of the tariff regime and the 2020 deal, were 2.78 million teu by 2024 they had declined to 1.65 million teu, according to MDS Transmodal data.

“Today the only undisputed ‘historical’ aspect of that [2020] agreement is its failure,” said PIIE.

However, MDS Transmodal analyst Teodoro also points out that the consultancy’s data also shows that US exports measured in tonnes reveals a slightly different story.

Prior to the introduction of tariffs US imports from China stood at 77.7 million tonnes, peaking at 82 million tonnes the following year and declining to 70.5 million tonnes in 2024.

US exports to China were 98.1 million tonnes in 2017, peaked at 127.4 million tonnes in 2021, and steadily declined to 99.3 million tonnes last year.

Noting the major effects that affected the trades during the pandemic, Teodoro explains that: “US exports are weight-heavy and commodity-driven, while China’s exports are container-heavy and value-driven. Both directions saw declines in 2023, with China-to-USA trade shrinking more dramatically. 2024 is expected to see some recovery in China-to-USA trade.

