

Weekly China Insight

Beijing, 26 September 2025

China pledges further emissions cut, positioning itself as a global climate leader

On 24 September, President Xi Jinping delivered video remarks to the United Nations Climate Summit, marking the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement and unveiling China's new 2035 climate commitments. Xi announced that by 2035, China will cut its total net greenhouse gas emissions by 7-10% from peak levels, increase non-fossil fuels to over 30% of energy consumption, and raise wind and solar capacity to six times their 2020 levels (targeting 3.6 billion kilowatts). Other goals include expanding forest stock to over 24 billion cubic meters, making new energy vehicles the dominant type in auto sales, and expanding the national carbon market to cover major high-emission sectors. Xi emphasized the principles of fairness and common but differentiated responsibilities, calling on developed countries to lead in emissions reductions and support developing nations with financing and technology.

This is China's first absolute emissions reduction target, signaling a calibrated shift from peak-and-decline rhetoric to concrete cuts. This pledge allows Beijing to contrast its climate continuity with US retrenchment on the climate front, while preserving flexibility ahead of COP30.

China relinquishes WTO developing-country perks in support of multilateral reform

On 24 September, China formally announced it would no longer seek new Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) provisions in current or future World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations. Chinese Premier Li Qiang made the declaration at a high-level Global Development Initiative (GDI) meeting in New York, framing the move as part of China's commitment to global development and responsible multilateralism. SDT provisions, which allow developing countries less trade obligations, have long been a sticking point in WTO reform talks, with developed members insisting China's economic scale makes its continued access to such perks unfair. WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala welcomed the move, calling it a "culmination of many years of hard work" and applauding China's leadership. China's Ministry of Commerce emphasized that while China's status as a developing member remains unchanged, its stance signals support for WTO reform, global development equity, and renewed momentum for the 2026 WTO Ministerial in Cameroon.

China's decision strategically positions it as both a reform-minded global player and a leader of the Global South, while disallowing the US a key reason for criticism by preemptively addressing long-standing concerns over its access to trade perks associated with its developing country status.

China launches first direct Arctic shipping route to Europe, cutting transit time to 18 days

On 23 September, the container ship Istanbul Bridge departed Ningbo-Zhoushan Port bound for the UK's Felixstowe Port, inaugurating the world's first China-Europe Arctic container express route. The new route follows the Northeast Passage along Russia's Arctic coast and reduces transit time to just 18 days – nearly half that of traditional routes via the Suez Canal or Cape of Good Hope. Operated by Sea Legend Shipping, the service carries USD 200 million worth of high-value goods, including solar components and energy storage systems, and offers a politically stable, piracy-free corridor with estimated 50% lower carbon emissions. The new route is also faster than both rail-based China-Europe freight services and China's own fast line to Germany launched in 2024.

The Arctic express route marks a strategic breakthrough in China's Belt and Road Initiative, improving logistical resilience amid rising global disruptions. This new route also positions China to shape future Arctic governance and maritime trade.

US House delegation visits China in symbolic thaw, signaling effort to rebuild ties

On 25 September, a bipartisan delegation from the US House of Representatives concluded a five-day visit to China, the first such congressional trip since 2019. The trip marks a cautious but notable step toward stabilizing deteriorating bilateral relations. The delegation, led by Representative Adam Smith (D-WA), Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee, included both Democratic and Republican lawmakers and focused heavily on re-establishing communication channels between the two governments, especially in military and legislative domains. During their visit, the delegation met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Defense Minister Dong Jun, Vice Premier He Lifeng, and Shanghai Mayor Gong Zheng, discussing a wide range of pressing issues from trade and technology to fentanyl trafficking and strategic military dialogue.

The Chinese side framed the visit as a breakthrough in congressional engagement, following years of stalled dialogue exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's 2022 visit to Taiwan. Representative Smith called the meetings "robust and very helpful," noting that the delegation's objective was to reopen dialogue between "the two most powerful countries in the world" and to help prevent miscalculations. Discussions included resuming military communication, tackling non-tariff trade barriers, managing export controls on critical minerals, and reducing risks of military conflict. In Shanghai, Smith also floated the need to renegotiate global economic governance rules to better reflect the rise of China, India, and Brazil, echoing Beijing's own recent calls for more equitable global representation.

The US House delegation's rare visit signals a meaningful but tentative shift in the US Congress's approach to China, moving from legislative containment toward conditional engagement. It serves multiple strategic purposes, including to pave the way for a Xi-Trump meeting at the upcoming APEC summit, reinforce channels of military dialogue amid intensifying maritime risks, and potentially defuse some economic tensions through direct legislative diplomacy. However, with US Congress having passed over two dozen anti-China bills in 2024 alone, the credibility of this shift will hinge on whether the political will to

institutionalize dialogue can survive the deepening hostility toward China in Washington. For Beijing, the visit provides a platform to push for a multipolar global order and test whether bipartisan US lawmakers are open to recalibrating decades-old frameworks of economic and security dominance.