

Trump tries a new trick to raise tariffs

Editoriale

The Trump administration keeps pursuing creative ways to impose tariffs after setbacks in the courts and amid a lack of support on Capitol Hill. The latest gambit came late Tuesday when the U.S. trade representative [announced plans to raise tariffs](#) between 10 percent to 12.5 percent on 60 countries for not being aggressive enough about combating the use of forced labor in their supply chains.

This is clearly a pretext for protectionism. If it weren't, China wouldn't be subject to the same new import taxes as Japan, South Korea and Switzerland.

Forced labor is a form of modern slavery. It's an abhorrent practice, which is why the U.S. bans its use in the 13th Amendment and [Title 18](#) of the federal criminal code. There have also been laws on the books for [nearly a century](#) prohibiting the import of goods made by coerced laborers.

This includes the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act of 2021, which recognizes China's [detention and abuse](#) of the predominantly Muslim ethnic group in the Xinjiang region and prohibits products made there from entering the U.S.

The breadth of the new tariffs underscores that combating the exploitation of foreign workers is not motivating the administration to act. Instead, the president is looking for another way to implement the significant import taxes he announced last April.

The duties announced on "Liberation Day," implemented under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, were struck down by the Supreme Court in a 6-3 decision. (The administration is [now dragging its heels](#) on refunding the illegal taxes it collected.)

Since then, the president has relied on Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to keep 10 percent baseline tariffs in place, but this is permitted for only 150 days, and that clock runs out on July 24.

President Donald Trump could always ask Congress to pass a tariff bill, but he knows neither GOP-controlled chamber would pass it.

The tariffs proposed Tuesday must go through a public comment period, with hearings scheduled to begin on July 7, but those are usually a mere formality.

Meanwhile, the Trump team continues exploring other avenues for imposing tariffs. On Monday, the administration proposed 25 percent tariffs on Brazil under Section 301 of the Trade Act, accusing the country of not enforcing anti-corruption laws. It is also investigating 16 trading partners, which account for 70 percent of imports, for dumping products in the U.S. at artificially low prices to hurt domestic manufacturing.

While the White House is keen to make a show of finding new ways to impose tariffs, many of the president's advisers privately recognize that they are a drag on the economy. That's why they keep broadening exemptions to minimize the pain.

Notably, the administration is exempting a long list of staples from the forced-labor tariffs, including coffee, beef and rare-earth minerals needed to manufacture high-tech goods.

Canada and Mexico are subject to the 10 percent additional tariffs, but [they will be waived](#) for goods that are covered by the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

Just this week, the [White House lowered](#) its 25 percent tariff on agricultural and industrial equipment to 15 percent, a tacit acknowledgment that these taxes are raising prices for farmers and leading to higher prices for shoppers who eventually buy what they produce.

If help is warranted for farmers, and it is, why not give all Americans the same relief?