



China to conduct in-orbit upgrade of BDS

China will carry out an in-orbit upgrade of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System to further improve service quality and optimize the operational status of satellites **3**

China prioritizes high-quality dev't in 15th FYP

Looking ahead, the priorities of the 15th Five-Year Plan indicate an even clearer transition toward high-quality development, says former Egyptian PM **7**

Tech transforms how China plants trees and restores deserts

Small drones were flying overhead – each carrying a young tree seedling, ferrying it toward the slopes of the surrounding hills. The moment reflects a much larger story of China's green efforts **8-9**

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VOLUME 17 • NO. 4861 • MARCH 14-15, 2026 • PRICE 2 YUAN

人民日报社主管 《环球时报》社有限公司主办、出版



Members of the UN Security Council vote in favor of a sanctions resolution regarding the situation in Iran and the Middle East at UN headquarters in New York City, US, on March 12, 2026. At a meeting of the 15-member UN Security Council, which is chaired this month by the US, Russia and China voted to halt the so-called 1737 Committee, which was established to oversee compliance with sanctions on Tehran. Photo: IC

China calls for keeping global critical mineral supply chains safe, stable, opposes 'small-circle' rules

By Chen Qingrui

China on Friday called on all parties to play a constructive role in safeguarding the stability and security of global critical minerals supply chains and expressed opposition to undermining the international economic and trade order through "small-circle" rules.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun made the comments at the regular press conference on Friday when asked about a reported plan on a trade agreement on critical minerals between the US, Japan and the European Union (EU).

"An open and inclusive international trade environment beneficial to all serves the common interests of all countries. All parties have the responsibility to play a constructive role in keeping global industrial and supply chains on critical minerals stable and secure," Guo said.

The US, Japan and the EU are set to announce plans in the coming weeks to lay the foundation for a trade agreement on critical minerals, Bloomberg reported on Friday, citing people familiar with the issue, claiming that China has "threatened it would retaliate against the formation of a bloc that would target its exports."

The agreement was spearheaded by the Office of the US Trade Representative, which has led negotiations with Brussels and Tokyo on the framework. It will also head talks for a trade deal that is set to include a price floor and tariffs for the materials to counter any market distortions by China, said the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, per Bloomberg.

Previously, Reuters explained that the idea of guaranteeing minimum prices through coordinated trade rules was intended to unlock private investment in mining and processing projects.

"Their wish is that a price floor would guarantee suppliers a minimum return,

▶ Political gambling and retaliatory resolve fuel escalation: expert

China steps up diplomatic push as Iran war hits 2 weeks

By Wang Qi and Li Yu

As the US-Israeli war against Iran entered the two-week mark on Friday, global concerns are mounting with almost no signs of relief, along with growing casualties, soaring oil prices and tumbling stocks.

Yet, amid no indication of any end in sight, China continues its shuttle diplomacy to push for de-escalation and a political settlement.

According to a release by the Chinese Foreign Ministry on Friday, Zhai Jun, special envoy of the Chinese government on the Middle East issue,

on Thursday met with Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani at Manama, Bahrain.

Zhai said that the current escalation of tensions in the region is not in the interests of any party, and the urgent priority is to immediately cease military actions and prevent the conflict from spreading further. The envoy added that China is ready to maintain close communication and coordination with Bahrain and play a constructive role in promoting peace and stability in the region.

Earlier, Zhai visited Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and

held talks with their respective foreign ministers. The Chinese envoy also held talks with Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Jassem Mohamed Albudaiwi in Riyadh.

In parallel diplomatic efforts, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had a phone conversation with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty on Thursday, calling on all parties to urge those involved in the current conflict in the Middle East to cease military operations as soon as possible and prevent the situation from deteriorating further.

From March 1 to 12,

▶ End of travel rush



Tourists are seen at Harbin Railway Station in Harbin, Northeast China's Heilongjiang Province on March 13, 2026, the last day of China's 40-day Spring Festival travel rush. Photo: cnsphoto

Price floors, tariffs no fix for refining innovation concern: expert

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allowing them to cover costs and sustain production amid global competition. However, such mechanisms do little to improve suppliers' underlying capacity or technological capabilities," Zhou Mi, a senior research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, told the Global Times on Friday.

Tariffs and other trade barriers could instead drive up procurement costs for critical minerals, forcing consumers of the resources to shoulder higher prices and additional supply chain risks, said Jian Junbo, director of the Center for China-Europe Relations at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies.

Industry observers said that amid the lingering trust crisis triggered by US' unilateralism, the actual outcome of this US-led agreement would be "super low." Deepening interest divisions could further disrupt supply chains, while mechanisms such as tariffs or price floors would not fundamentally enhance production capacity or technological capabilities.

Conflicting interests

According to the Bloomberg, the US is aiming to start negotiations for the trade agreement with the EU and Japan in critical minerals in April, shortly after a comment period for stakeholders to weigh in ends on March 19.

However, divisions and conflict of interest between the US and its allies are apparent. Notably, Politico reported on Wednesday that the EU and the US are closing in on a deal to reduce "dependence on China for critical mineral inputs", but the agreement could end up "cementing an unequal partnership dominated by Washington."

Andreas Kroll, CEO of Noble Elements, a German-based rare-earth commodity trading firm, also said in the report that Europe is "sitting at the kids' table" compared with the US. "Many of our mid-sized customers are asking themselves whether they should relocate their production to the US" due to supply dependencies, Kroll said.

Apart from concerns about US dominance within the EU, Japan, France and Canada have recently been working on alternatives to a US-led trade bloc to secure critical minerals and "reduce reliance on China", Reuters reported.

Western countries have faced mounting challenges in maintaining stable supply chains in recent years, particularly in critical minerals, where pressures largely stem from difficulties in achieving breakthroughs in refining and processing technologies, Zhou said. However, market misperceptions and misplaced accusations against China risk diverting attention from this most critical link, he added.

"The US, the EU and Japan are hoping to ease supply pressures from the demand side. However, their interests are far from aligned. The US remains the dominant player, prioritizing absolute security and stability in its critical minerals supply chains and expecting allies such as Europe and Japan to accommodate its strategic needs," Zhou noted, adding that policy bias will weaken others' access to stable supplies and make critical minerals supply chains less secure.

Zhou warned that relying on tariffs or price floors will not fundamentally enhance production capacity or technological capabilities. Such interventions could instead weaken market-driven innovation and fail to create genuine economies of scale.

Tit-for-tat over Hormuz signals quick end unrealistic: analyst

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Wang has held 12 phone calls with his counterparts from countries including Russia, Oman, Iran, France, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Pakistan, Qatar and Egypt, in which he called for de-escalation of the situation in the region, according to publicly available information.

Wang also exchanged views on the Iran situation with Afghan Foreign Minister in a phone call on Friday.

Tougher stance, greater losses

Following Iran's new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei's Thursday message, in which he called for the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz and pledged to open new fronts in his country's conflict with the US and Israel, US President Donald Trump said the US has "unparalleled firepower, unlimited ammunition, and plenty of time", in a Friday post on Truth Social.

According to Iran's Fars news agency, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has announced its 44th wave of attacks against Israeli and US forces in the region, targeting multiple Israeli cities and US bases in the region and the US Fifth Fleet.

IRGC said in a statement early Friday that a missile and drone attack caused significant damage to the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, according to Anadolu Agency.

Meanwhile, two US officials told CBS that the US side has fired at an Iranian vessel which sailed too close to the USS Abraham Lincoln.

In Tehran, one person was killed by a US-Israeli air strike on Friday after multiple explosions were heard around the al-Quds Day march, where thousands were taking part in

annual rallies held in solidarity with Palestinians, according to Al Jazeera.

Citing a Pentagon official on Tuesday, US media reported that seven US troops had been killed and about 140 service members wounded in the conflict so far. However, sources with knowledge of the situation told ABC news that the number of wounded troops appeared to be significantly higher than what had been publicly disclosed.

Iran's Health Ministry said on Friday that at least 1,444 people have been killed and 18,551 injured by US-Israeli attacks on Iran since February 28, according to Al Jazeera.

Chinese experts reached by the Global Times believed that the conflict is escalating in intensity, displaying an upward trajectory.

Tian Wenlin, a research fellow at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, told the Global Times that the US and Israel are exhibiting a political gambler's and military adventurist mentality. Having failed to topple the Iranian regime, they are compelled to double down on their bets to recoup earlier losses.

Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times on Friday that the US, driven by the need to save face, is intensifying strikes on Iran in hopes of compelling Tehran's submission. Likewise, after selecting a new Supreme Leader, Iran needs to demonstrate a stronger resolve to strike back in order to enhance its authority, rally domestic support, and consolidate national unity.

Tumbling stocks, soaring oil prices

Although both the International Energy Agency and the US Energy Department announced it

was releasing hundreds of millions of barrels of oil from emergency stockpiles, efforts have failed to stop the soaring oil prices and tumbling stocks amid the escalating conflict.

According to CNBC, on Thursday local time in the US, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, S&P 500, as well as the Nasdaq Composite, all posted closing lows for 2026, and the 30-stock Dow ended the session below the 47,000 threshold for the first time this year.

Meanwhile, West Texas Intermediate futures rose 9.72 percent to settle at \$95.73 per barrel. Brent crude futures settled up 9.22 percent to \$100.46 per barrel.

In a Fox Interview aired on Friday, Trump said the US would escort vessels through the Strait of Hormuz if needed, adding that the US would strike Iran "very hard over the next week," Reuters reported.

Despite the US Central Command saying Thursday that the US military has damaged 30 mine-laying vessels, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi told AFP on Thursday that "it is not true" that Iran was mining the strait and that Tehran has cooperated with some countries regarding passage through the waterway.

On Friday, Turkish Transport Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu told local media that a Turkish-owned ship has passed the Strait of Hormuz after receiving approval from Iran.

The International Maritime Organization will convene a session next week to discuss threats to shipping in the Middle East and particularly in the Strait of Hormuz, the agency said Thursday, per CBS News.

In general, a tit-for-tat confrontation between the two sides over the Strait of Hormuz suggests that a rapid end to the war has become increasingly unrealistic, Liu said.