GLOBAL TIMES
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DISCOVER CHINA, DISCOVER THE WORLD

China, Russia deepen fishery conservation co-op

China and Russia carried out a joint fish stock enhancement and release activity in Tongjiang, Northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, on Tuesday 3

Sugon 8000 advances China's AI capabilities

China's first fully domestically developed 100,000-card AI supercluster Sugon 8000 is advancing AI infrastructure, scientific discovery and industrial intelligence 13

Why has the CPC remained vibrant after 105 years?

In the 26th installment of the "Decoding the Book of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*" series, we explore the question: "Why has the Communist Party of China remained vibrant after 105 years?" 8-9

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Domestically produced vehicles are ready for export overseas at the Taicang port zone of Suzhou Port, East China's Jiangsu Province on July 14, 2026. Photo: CNS Photo

▶ Imports surge 22.1%, outpacing export growth as domestic market expands

China's H1 trade grows 16.9% to exceed 25 trillion yuan

By Chi Jingyi and Li Xuanmin

China's foreign trade stood at 25.47 trillion yuan ($3.75 trillion) in the first half of 2026, up 16.9 percent year-on-year, reaching a new high. China has firmly maintained its position as the world's largest goods trading nation, an official of the General Administration of Customs of China (GAC) said on Tuesday at a press conference for China's half-year trade performance.

"Amid geopolitical tensions and disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, the world has become more aware of the indispensable role of Chinese supply chains in global industry and critical goods. Notably, China's import growth significantly exceeded export growth in the first half of 2026," Tian Yun, a Beijing-based economist, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

In the first half of 2026, China's total goods imports and exports reached 25.47 trillion yuan, exceeding 25 trillion yuan for the first time in the same period on record, representing a 16.9 percent year-on-year increase, statistics from the GAC showed on Tuesday.

Exports stood at 14.73 trillion yuan, up 13.4 percent year-on-year, marking growth for 11 consecutive quarters. Imports totaled 10.74 trillion

▶ 2 AI

US, Iran exchange more attacks amid Hormuz dual blockades row

By Wang Qi

Just weeks after a ceasefire MoU was signed, tensions in the Middle East flared once again. Washington has reinstated its naval blockade of ships bound for and departing Iranian ports and conducted airstrikes against Iran for three consecutive nights, while Tehran retaliated by firing missiles at US military assets and American military outposts based in regional nations, multiple media outlets reported.

Analysts said the renewed military clashes have escalated the US-Iran rivalry, with the Strait of Hormuz emerging as the core flashpoint. They noted the two sides may resume talks in the long run, yet the game of brinkmanship may turn into a protracted back-and-forth, with cycles of armed clashes and diplomatic talks set to persist and a smooth path to de-escalation remaining elusive.

In response to renewed military hostilities and the US' order to reinstate a naval blockade on Iran in the Strait of Hormuz, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said on Tuesday that China calls on relevant parties to heed the strong call for peace and stability from the region and beyond, remain calm and exercise restraint, safeguard the hard-won ceasefire, avoid the return of war and more importantly, prevent the fighting from spreading and hurting more innocent people.

"Respect for the lawful rights and interests of coastal countries of the Strait of Hormuz and an early resumption of normal and safe passage at the Strait is what the international community wants to see. Relevant parties need to work in the same direction and

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AI, green industries power China's trade resilience

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yuan, rising 22.1 percent year-on-year, which is 8.7 percentage points faster than exports, helping promote more balanced trade development.

Chinese experts noted that the country's efforts to boost industrial upgrading can be clearly seen from the product structure in exports. Meanwhile, China's super-large market provided and will continue to provide vast opportunities for exporters from all over the world.

Stable supplies

Under the impact of disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, China's stable supplies to the world have provided affordable products to global consumers and enterprises, maintaining their operations, they said.

In terms of exports, China's product structure continued to improve. In the first half of the year, exports of mechanical and electrical products reached 9.36 trillion yuan, up 20.1 percent year-on-year, accounting for 63.5 percent of total exports – an increase of 3.5 percentage points from the same period last year. High-tech product exports grew 39 percent to 3.26 trillion yuan, GAC statistics showed.

Speaking of the leading factors that drive forward China's exports, Wang Jun, vice minister of GAC, said on Tuesday at the press conference that the fundamental driver is the precise alignment between Chinese manufacturing and diverse global demands.

"A United Nations report showed that global goods trade growth this year has been concentrated in artificial intelligence (AI)-related sectors. Surging demand for computing power, data centers, and terminal equipment has driven strong Chinese exports. In the first half of the year, exports of electronic components and computer parts posted double-digit growth, contributing a combined 6.9 percentage points to overall export growth," Wang said.

Wang also pointed to global green and low-carbon transition demand, which has created strong synergy with China's green products. In the first half of the year, exports of lithium batteries and wind turbines grew 37.6 percent and 35.6 percent respectively. Green mobility products such as electric vehicles (EV), railway electric locomotives, electric motorcycles, and bicycles increased 68.7 percent, 45.1 percent, and 31.5 percent respectively.

According to GAC data, China exported over 10,000 units of intelligent bionic robots that have been deeply integrated with AI technology in the first half of the year, covering more than 90 countries and regions around the world.

During the same period, the export of surgical robots reached 480 million yuan, increasing by 3.3 times. The export market expanded from 23 countries last year to 49 countries this year. "Intelligent medical equipment produced in China is benefiting an increasing number of patients," said Wang.

Lü Daliang, spokesperson of the GAC, also pointed out that in the first half of the year, a significant share of China's exports was generated by foreign-invested enterprises.

"Foreign-invested enterprises are deeply rooted in China, producing in China for the global market and continuously creating profits for investors. They accounted for nearly 30 percent of exports to the EU and nearly 40 percent to South Korea. Their share also exceeded 30 percent in emerging markets such as Mexico and Vietnam," said Lü.

Second-largest import market

In terms of what supported China's fast-growing imports, Wang pointed to the country's super-scale market, steady economic performance and systematically broadened unilateral opening-up.

"China has been the world's second-largest import market for 17 consecutive years, with average annual growth of 5.1 percent, raising its share of global imports from 7.9 percent to around 10 percent. China has granted zero-tariff treatment to 63 countries and successfully hosted major international expos. In the first half of the year, imports from over 150 countries and regions increased," said Wang.

Seen from China's trade partners, diversified markets were further strengthened. Trade with Belt and Road Initiative partner countries reached 12.97 trillion yuan, up 14.8 percent year-on-year, accounting for 50.9 percent of total foreign trade. Trade with Latin America and Africa increased 16.2 percent and 19.6 percent respectively, while trade with the EU rose 10.2 percent. The total import and export volume with neighboring countries reached 9.44 trillion yuan, increasing by 20.6 percent.

"Looking ahead, China's export growth is expected to remain strong in July, supported by the global AI investment boom and robust automobile exports, given the fast export growth in chips, AI-related electronic parts in June," Feng Lin, executive director of research at Golden Credit Rating International, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

"With the following procedure of Section 301 investigation in July, tariff policies may undergo important adjustments. The sustainability of the global AI investment surge in the second half of the year needs close monitoring, and the super-high-growth momentum in chip exports may face downward fluctuations," said Feng.

"Overall, China's foreign trade maintained strong performance in the first half of 2026, with notable progress in stabilizing scale and optimizing structure. However, challenges persist, meaning that stabilizing foreign trade in the second half of the year will face considerable risks and challenges," Wang said, pointing to ongoing global inflationary pressures, rising trade barriers, frequent geopolitical conflicts, and sustained strain on global supply chains.

Cycles of clashes and diplomacy to persist as brinkmanship drags on: expert

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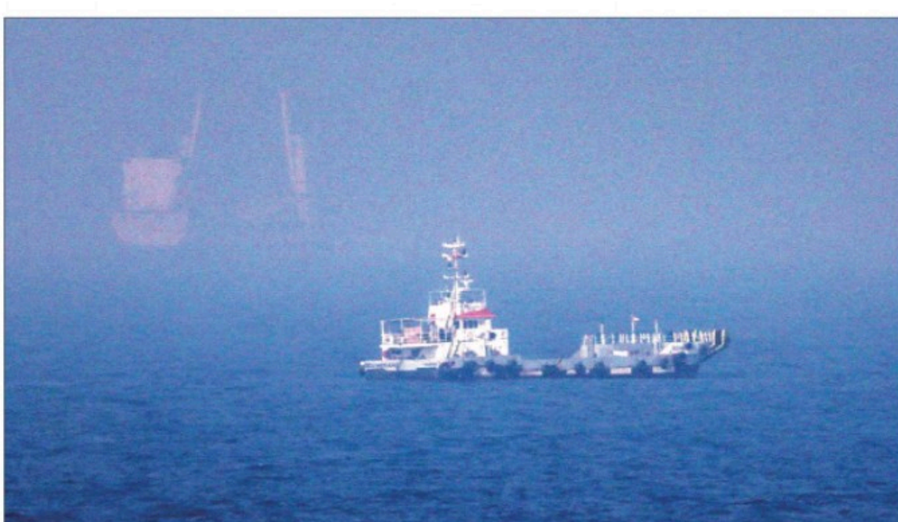
seek a proper settlement," Lin said.

Protracted back-and-forth

In an X post on Tuesday, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said that the US completed the latest wave of strikes against Iran at 10:15 pm ET on July 13.

On Monday local time, US President Donald Trump said that the US would take out Pickaxe Mountain in Iran, a deeply buried site that is believed to be part of Iran's nuclear program, CBS News reported.

In a statement, the Iranian army said it had targeted US military assets in Kuwait, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. Early on Tuesday morning, Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) confirmed they had targeted several missile depots and fuel storage facilities at Jordan's Prince Hassan Air Base which has been used by the US and allied forces for regional operations, per Iran International.



Ships sail near the Strait of Hormuz off the eastern coast of the United Arab Emirates at Khor Fakkan on July 13, 2026. Photo: VCG

Zhu Yongbiao, an expert on Middle Eastern affairs at Lanzhou University, told the Global Times on Tuesday that the severe lack of strategic trust between the US and Iran lies at the heart of the resurgent military confrontation. Another major contributing factor is that both countries, particularly the US, are dissatisfied with their respective negotiating goals and bargaining chips from previous rounds of talks.

Judging by the scale of the latest military strikes and Washington's threats to target Iran's nuclear-related locations, the US' latest military actions serve as a typical tool of Washington's longstanding maximum pressure campaign, designed to secure greater leverage in future negotiations, the expert said.

In the long run, Zhu said the US and Iran are likely to return to the negotiating table, yet their game of brinkmanship will evolve into a protracted back-and-forth. Cycles of armed clashes followed by diplomatic talks are set to persist.

The Hormuz flashpoint

Hours before launching its latest wave of airstrikes, Trump issued an order at 4 pm local time on Tuesday reinstating the naval blockade on Iran in the Strait of Hormuz and floated a 20 percent transit toll for all ships traversing the vital global energy artery, CNBC reported.

Trump's actions came shortly after he formally notified Congress that fighting has resumed amid tit-for-tat attacks by both sides in recent days, according to New York Times.

"Despite a host of thorny issues including the nuclear issue between the US and Iran, disputes over the management of the Strait of Hormuz stand as the flashpoint of their current game," said Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University.

Washington's decision to impose a naval blockade on the strait alongside threats to levy transit fees is a strategic gambit amid its dilemma between military confrontation and diplomatic easing. The move intends to ramp up pressure on Iran and Gulf states alike, while grabbing dominance in drafting navigation regulations governing the strait, Liu said.

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