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U.S. hits Chinese solar panel with hefty tariffs

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By Wendy Koch, USA TODAY

Updated 14h 56m ago

The Obama administration called Thursday for hefty tariffs on Chinese-made solar panels and cells, arguing China has been illegally "dumping" under-priced products on the U.S. market.



CAPTION

By STR/AFP/Getty Images

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The preliminary ruling by the U.S. Department of Commerce seeks tariffs ranging from 31% to 250% on solar products imported from China. A final decision is expected later this year.

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The [trade case has divided the U.S. solar industry](#). Some manufacturers say China's subsidies have made it difficult for them to compete, causing several bankruptcies such as Solyndra's. Other U.S. solar companies say tariffs could hike solar panel prices, inflame trade tensions and stunt the industry's growth.

Commerce's ruling "is a bellwether decision," Steve Ostrenga, chief executive officer of Milwaukee-based Helios Solar Works, said in a statement. "It underscores the importance of domestic manufacturing to the U.S. economy and will help determine whether the country will be a global competitor in clean technologies or outsource them China. It is also critically important for thousands of U.S. workers."

Other U.S. solar companies said they would push for much lower tariffs. They argue most solar-industry jobs are in sales, marketing, design, installation, engineering and maintenance of solar projects and higher solar prices could result in layoffs.

"This decision will increase solar electricity prices in the U.S. precisely at the moment solar power is becoming competitive with fossil fuel generated electricity," Jigar Shah, the president of the Coalition for Affordable Solar Energy, which opposes the tariffs, said in a statement.

In October, Helios, New Jersey-based MX Solar USA joined Oregon-based SolarWorld Industries America in filing a petition with the Commerce Department and the International Trade Commission. They alleged Chinese manufacturers were illegally dumping solar cells and panels in the U.S. market and receiving billions in illegal subsidies.

In a preliminary decision in March, Commerce agreed that China had provided subsidies deemed illegal by the World

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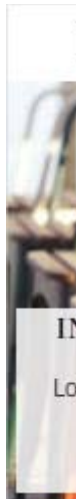
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Trade Organization and imposed tariffs of 2.9% to 4.7%, which were significantly lower than what the petitioners sought.

Commerce's ruling Thursday said Wuxi Suntech and Trina Solar will face tariffs of 31.22 and 31.14%, respectively, and 59 other solar panel exporters will be hit with a 31.18% percent tariff. The rest of the Chinese export market will face a 249.96% tariff. The tariffs apply to crystalline silicon photovoltaic cells and will be retroactive for 90 days.

The department is expected to make its final decision this fall and will begin collecting the tariffs if the International Trade Commission determines in November that the under-priced panels are injuring the solar industry.

The Solar Energy Industries Association, the solar industry's trade group, called on China and the United States to work together to resolve the issue. Since it represents a wide range of solar companies, it has not taken an official position on the trade case.

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