‘Hard-to-book-a-ship’ phenomenon reflects nature of China-US economic and trade ties: Global Times editorial

Beijing, China May 19, 2025 (Issuewire.com) - Following the implementation of the Joint Statement on China-US Economic and Trade Meeting in Geneva, both countries enacted tariff adjustments on May 14. Since then, the China-US shipping market has seen a surge in demand, leading to a "hard-to-book-a-ship" scenario. Chinese exporters have been overwhelmed with calls from American clients, anxiety around importing goods from the US has alleviated, Shenzhen's Yantian Port is operating at full capacity, and bookings for containers and cargo space to the US have skyrocketed. In fact, "almost all routes to the US are nearly fully booked through the end of May." This reflects the strong and persistent demand between China and the US.

Behind the "hard-to-book-a-ship" phenomenon is that Chinese and US companies are meeting each other halfway. After decades of integration and development, the economies of China and the US are deeply intertwined, with their trade structures highly complementary, forming a supply-and-demand bond that is indivisible and indispensable.

In 2024, the volume of trade in goods between China and the US reached $688.28 billion, with two-way trade in services expanding significantly to $66.86 billion. US goods exports to China hit $143.55 billion, an increase of 648.4 percent from 2001, far exceeding the growth rate of US exports globally over the same period. Currently, the US is China's largest goods export destination and the second-largest source of imports, while China is the US's third-largest export destination and second-largest source of imports. These achievements have come despite the turbulence in bilateral trade relations in recent years, demonstrating the resilience of trade ties between the two countries.

China's exports to the US, including electromechanical products, electronics, construction machinery, chemical products, and various consumer goods, meet American market demands and generate profits for Chinese businesses. Meanwhile, China's vast market potential offers significant export opportunities for US goods such as agricultural products, semiconductors, aerospace equipment, and automobiles and parts. While American manufacturers benefit, related industries in China also achieve development and technological advancement. High tariff barriers cannot sever this two-way demand; they merely act as a temporary "dammed lake" between the two economies. Even if these barriers are only partially lifted, demand flows again like an unstoppable tide.

The essence of China-US economic and trade relations is mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. Any attempts to undermine this relationship through tariff wars or trade wars will ultimately prove counterproductive. Before progress was made in the China-US economic and trade talks in Geneva, a rare phenomenon occurred at the once-busy Port of Los Angeles, where more than half of the container ship berths were vacant. Meanwhile, cargo volume at the Port of Long Beach, another container port in California, decreased by approximately 30 percent. From the "sailing suspension" crisis a few months ago to the current "rush to ship," this round of tariff turmoil highlights the critical significance of policy stability for global supply chains and adds a new footnote to the conclusion that "China and the US both stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation."

Cargo ships departing from China and crossing the Pacific carry the precise fulfillment of the demands of American consumers and businesses by Chinese manufacturers. From the transoceanic phone calls between Chinese and US companies, to the bustling factories and logistics, and even to the "hard-to-book-a-ship" phenomenon on China-US routes, the entire industrial supply chain presents a vivid picture of high interdependence. The deep integration of the economies of China and the US is reflected not only in the fluctuations of trade volume but also in the well-being of the people of both countries. This proves that significantly reducing bilateral tariffs allows goods from both countries to circulate more smoothly, meeting consumers' diverse needs while also bringing tangible benefits to the people and businesses in both nations.

However, for businesses in both countries, their concern is that US policies may still fluctuate after 90 days. They hope that through subsequent consultations, the US and China can further reduce tariffs, as the 30 percent tariffs imposed on Chinese goods by the US are still considered "very high." We hope that the US side will thoroughly correct the mistake of unilateral tariff increases and transform the "tariff truce" into a lasting normalization of trade cooperation between China and the US. This aligns with the common interests of both countries and their peoples, and it is also an inevitable requirement of economic laws.

The "hard-to-book-a-ship" phenomenon reflects the market's strong appreciation for the 90-day "window of opportunity." More importantly, it should be seen as a call for deeper cooperation between China and the US. The two countries are development opportunities for each other, and the window for mutually beneficial cooperation should extend far beyond a period of a mere 90-day period. The trans-Pacific routes should not be merely for urgent shipments and temporary stockpiling, but should instead become steady channels of trade, linking the prosperity and future of both nations. Hopefully, the US side will build on the outcomes of the recent talks and continue to meet China halfway, transforming the current surge in shipping demand into concrete actions of sustainable cooperation and mutual benefit between the two countries, and jointly contributing to greater certainty and stability in the global economy.

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