US Restrictions on Chinese Telecom Firms Fuel Tensions with Beijing

23 NOVEMBER 2026

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China Unicom is among the three Chinese telecommunications companies affected by the new FCC restrictions.

US Telecommunications Restrictions Trigger Chinese Response

Beijing is calling on the United States to lift the restrictions imposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) last week on Chinese telecommunications companies, and is threatening to take retaliatory measures if Washington fails to do so. The decision restricts China Mobile, China Telecom and China Unicom from directly accessing US telephone numbering resources. The FCC justifies the move on the grounds of national security, arguing that it is intended to protect against fraudulent calls, robocalls and cyber espionage. The Chinese Ministry of Commerce criticised the move, accusing the FCC of violating the principle of fair

competition, abusing the concept of national security, and undermining the consensus reached by Trump and Xi on economic relations between the two countries.

Technological Decoupling and the Limits of Diplomatic Rapprochement

The restrictions imposed by the FCC represent a further step towards the technological decoupling of the two major powers. The US in particular, but also China, are reducing their dependence on each other's technology for security reasons. The technology sector and economic relations are increasingly securitized. Furthermore, the measure demonstrates that the diplomatic rapprochement between Trump and Xi has its limits. The structural rivalry between the two states continues to be viewed as a major security risk and is being addressed and shaped by policy decisions taken by a number of state institutions. It remains to be seen whether Beijing is able or willing to respond with countermeasures, and how further tensions in the technology sector will affect bilateral relations.

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