

The Trump-Xi Summit of October 30, 2025: A Tactical Pause

Date: 31/10/2025

Introduction

The Trump-Xi Summit, held on October 30, 2025, marked a pivotal moment in the complex and often contentious relationship between the United States and China. Occurring amidst a backdrop of persistent strategic competition, trade disputes, and technological rivalry, this high-stakes meeting was widely anticipated as an opportunity to either de-escalate tensions or signal a further hardening of positions (Global Policy Review, 2025). However, early analyses suggest the summit concluded not with a grand bargain or a dramatic confrontation, but rather with what many observers are terming a “tactical pause”—a temporary de-escalation designed to serve immediate strategic interests for both Washington and Beijing (East Asia Monitor, 2025). This report delves into the context leading up to the summit, examines its key outcomes, explores the underlying motivations for this strategic lull, and considers the potential implications for the future of US-China relations.

Table of Contents

- Introduction
- Context of the Summit: A New Geopolitical Landscape
 - US-China Relations Pre-Summit
 - The Return of Trump: A Transactional Approach
- Key Outcomes of the October 30, 2025 Summit
 - Trade and Economic Dialogue: A Temporary Truce
 - Technology and Strategic Competition: Continued Guardrails
 - Taiwan and Regional Security: Maintaining the Status Quo
- The Rationale for a “Tactical Pause”
 - US Motivations: Domestic Focus and Strategic Reassessment
 - Chinese Motivations: Economic Stability and Global Positioning
- Implications and Future Trajectories
- Conclusion
- Sources

Summit Overview and Global Context

Geopolitical Backdrop and Pre-Summit Tensions

The meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping on October 30, 2025, occurred against a backdrop of deeply strained bilateral relations, marking their first face-to-face encounter in over six years, since the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, in June 2019 (VietnamPlus, 2025a). The intervening period was characterized by an escalating trade war, intense technological competition, and diverging strategic interests, creating a complex and volatile environment for the summit. The primary source of friction remained the trade war initiated during Trump’s first term, which had roiled the global economy and damaged businesses in both nations (CNN, 2025d). This economic confrontation was compounded by a fierce rivalry in critical technology sectors. The U.S. had imposed stringent restrictions on Chinese telecommunications equipment, citing national security concerns, and targeted key technologies like the advanced AI chips from companies such as Nvidia, which remained a sensitive and unresolved issue leading into the talks (VietnamPlus, 2025b; VietnamPlus, 2025c).

In the weeks preceding the summit, China had threatened to leverage its dominance in the rare earths market by curbing exports, a move that would significantly impact global supply chains for high-tech manufacturing. This threat was a major point of contention, with U.S. officials working to secure a reprieve (BBC News, 2025a). Conversely, the U.S. maintained high tariffs on a wide range of Chinese goods. Despite these deep-seated differences, there were signals of a potential, albeit limited, de-escalation. Pre-summit negotiations in Malaysia had laid the groundwork for a possible “tactical pause,” with analysts suggesting that

certain issues, such as China postponing its rare earth export restrictions in exchange for tariff reductions, were more amenable to resolution (VietnamPlus, 2025b; BBC News, 2025a). President Xi, in his opening remarks, acknowledged the inevitability of disagreements due to the different national circumstances of the two countries, framing them as normal “collisions” between the world’s two largest economies. He stressed the need for both leaders to “correctly determine the direction” and manage the bigger picture to ensure the relationship could move forward stably (VietnamPlus, 2025a). The summit was therefore viewed not as a platform for a comprehensive breakthrough but as a critical opportunity to halt the downward spiral in relations and establish a more stable, albeit competitive, framework for engagement.

Key Participants and Summit Logistics

The high-stakes summit between President Trump and President Xi took place on the morning of October 30, 2025, in the city of Busan, South Korea (VietnamPlus, 2025a). The meeting was strategically scheduled on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders’ Meeting, allowing both leaders to engage directly while attending the broader multilateral forum (VietnamPlus, 2025b). This arrangement is common for such bilateral talks, providing a neutral and efficient setting for dialogue amidst other international obligations. For President Trump, this was the final and most significant engagement of a five-day, three-nation tour of Asia, which also included a stop in Japan where he met with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi (CNN, 2025d; VietnamPlus, 2025a). The meeting marked the first face-to-face interaction between the two leaders during President Trump’s second term in office (CNN, 2025c).

The logistical arrangements were confirmed by both sides just days before the event. China’s Foreign Ministry officially announced on October 29 that President Xi would meet with President Trump to exchange views on bilateral relations and issues of common concern (VietnamPlus, 2025c). The lead-up involved extensive diplomatic groundwork, with U.S. officials, including Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, visiting Beijing to prepare for the meeting (BBC News, 2025a). The visual elements of the summit were carefully managed, with President Trump and President Xi posing for photographs before commencing their talks. Trump expressed confidence that the meeting would be “very successful” and described his counterpart as a “tough negotiator,” setting a tone of respectful but firm engagement (VietnamPlus, 2025a). The meeting garnered immense global attention, with millions of Chinese citizens following the event on social media platforms like Weibo, where it became the top trending topic with over 250 million views. Online comments reflected a public desire for de-escalation, with users posting messages such as, “Harmony between China and the US leads to global prosperity” (CNN, 2025d).

International Public Opinion and Soft Power Dynamics

The Trump-Xi summit unfolded at a time when global public opinion, a key measure of national soft power, was in a state of significant flux. The ongoing confrontation between the U.S. and China had prompted nations around the world to reassess their allegiances, with international perceptions of the two superpowers shifting notably in the year leading up to the meeting (Roll Call, 2025a). According to analysis based on Pew Research Center surveys, views of the United States had become more negative globally, while perceptions of China had turned more positive. This dynamic created a complex backdrop for the summit, where the outcome was poised to influence not just economic and security matters but also the global competition for leadership and influence (Roll Call, 2025a).

International sentiment was far from monolithic, with global publics deeply divided in their views of both nations. A July Pew survey highlighted this split, finding that people in eight surveyed nations held a more favorable opinion of the U.S., while those in seven held a more positive view of China, and nine viewed both nations roughly equally. When it came to confidence in the leaders themselves, President Trump held a slight edge, with publics in eleven nations expressing more confidence in him compared to six for President Xi. However, a critical vulnerability for the U.S. was the widespread disapproval of its foreign policy approach; a significant majority—six in ten of those questioned globally—criticized President Trump’s management of U.S.-China relations (Roll Call, 2025b). This suggests that while Trump may have been seen as a more decisive leader by some, his confrontational strategy toward China was not broadly popular internationally.

Public Opinion Metric	United States	China	Source
General Favorability Trend (Past Year)	More Negative	More Positive	(Roll Call, 2025a)
Number of Nations with More Favorable View	8	7	(Roll Call, 2025b)
Number of Nations with More Confidence in Leader	11 (Trump)	6 (Xi)	(Roll Call, 2025b)

This divided global landscape meant that both leaders were performing before a critical international audience. The summit was not just a bilateral negotiation but a global spectacle where the world was “choosing up sides” (Roll Call, 2025a). The outcome was set to be judged by nations deciding whether to align their future with Washington or Beijing, making the stakes of the meeting extend far beyond the immediate trade and security issues on the table.

Economic Pressures and Domestic Drivers

Both President Trump and President Xi arrived at the Busan summit motivated by significant domestic pressures that shaped their negotiating stances. For President Trump, the U.S. economic landscape and domestic political sentiment were key drivers. He entered the meeting with a “tailwind of support back home” for maintaining a tough stance on China (Roll Call, 2025a). A Pew Research Center survey from earlier in 2025 revealed that three in four Americans held a negative view of China, a level of public criticism even more pronounced than in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. However, the intensity of this sentiment had shown signs of softening, particularly among his own political base. In 2024, 59 percent of Republicans held a “very unfavorable” opinion of China, but by 2025, this figure had eased to 43 percent. This subtle shift provided Trump with the political flexibility to pivot from a purely confrontational “Tariff Man” persona to that of a dealmaker if a favorable agreement could be reached (Roll Call, 2025a). Securing a “win,” such as concessions on fentanyl precursors and increased purchases of U.S. agricultural products like soybeans, was domestically valuable, allowing him to demonstrate tangible results from his hardline approach (BBC News, 2025b).

On the Chinese side, President Xi was contending with the economic headwinds generated by the prolonged trade war and a desire to project stability and strength on the global stage. The mounting U.S. tariffs had hurt Chinese businesses and disrupted economic planning, creating an incentive for Beijing to seek a reprieve (CNN, 2025d). An agreement to pause further tariff escalations and resume key trade flows would provide much-needed predictability for the Chinese economy. Domestically, the summit was an opportunity for Xi to demonstrate his adeptness at managing the country’s most critical international relationship and to secure outcomes that he could present as beneficial to China’s national interests. The immense public interest within China, evidenced by the massive viewership on Weibo, underscored the domestic importance of a stable and prosperous relationship with the U.S. (CNN, 2025d). For both leaders, the summit was a balancing act: they needed to appear strong to their domestic audiences while also recognizing the pragmatic need to de-escalate a conflict that was imposing real economic costs at home.

The “G2” Concept and Shifting Power Narratives

A significant and unexpected narrative shift emerged just before the summit when President Trump posted a striking message on social media: “G2 will soon be meeting” (24h.com.vn, 2025). This public invocation of the “G2” (Group of Two) concept, a term first floated by academics in the mid-2000s to describe a potential duopoly of global governance by the U.S. and China, was seen by international observers as a potentially seismic development. The term had long been discussed in policy circles but had never been officially embraced by Washington, making Trump’s usage of it particularly noteworthy (24h.com.vn, 2025). The post was interpreted as signaling a possible fundamental change in U.S. strategic thinking, moving away from a policy of “containing China” toward an acknowledgment of a “song trụ quyền lực” (twin pillar of power) where Washington and Beijing would share responsibility for managing global affairs.

This narrative was reinforced by the tone and substance of the meeting itself. President Trump’s description of President Xi as an “outstanding leader of a powerful nation” and his declaration that the meeting was a “great success” departed from the more adversarial rhetoric of previous years (24h.com.vn, 2025). The specific agreements reached—such as tariff reductions, commitments on agricultural purchases, and cooperation on fentanyl and rare earths—were framed as mutually beneficial outcomes, aligning with the “win-win” spirit that a functional G2 would theoretically embody. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the idea of a G2 structure is predicated on the reality that the U.S. and China together account for nearly half of the global economic output, making their cooperation essential for addressing global challenges ([24h.com.vn, 2025](https://www.24h.com.vn/tin-t

Pre-Summit Tensions and Escalation

Tit-for-Tat Retaliations in the Weeks Leading to APEC

The period immediately preceding the APEC summit in South Korea was characterized by a significant and rapid escalation of trade hostilities between the United States and China, bringing the relationship to what some analysts described as the “brink of an abyss” (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025). This phase of the trade war was marked by a series of retaliatory measures that threatened to derail the planned meeting between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping. The escalating friction created a volatile atmosphere, shaking global markets and raising concerns about a new, more damaging phase of economic conflict (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025).

A key catalyst for the heightened tension was the Trump administration’s threat to impose tariffs of up to 100% on Chinese goods if the summit did not yield a satisfactory agreement. President Trump explicitly warned that the meeting itself might not happen, accusing China of engaging in “economic warfare” and blaming Beijing for the sudden deterioration in relations (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025). This rhetoric represented a sharp departure from the more optimistic tone following a phone call between the two leaders in September, where Trump had praised the “progress” in negotiations on issues ranging from trade to fentanyl trafficking (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025).

In response to the American pressure, China deployed its most significant economic leverage: control over the global supply of rare earth elements. Beijing announced new regulations that expanded the number of rare earth elements subject to export controls and tightened restrictions on related manufacturing technology and its use abroad. This move was widely seen as a direct and “proportional” response to the Trump administration’s actions, particularly the expansion of its export control list to include more Chinese technology entities at the end of September 2025 (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025). The action demonstrated China’s readiness to inflict pain on advanced manufacturing sectors in the U.S. and globally, which are heavily dependent on these critical minerals. Chinese analysts framed this as a necessary countermeasure, arguing that Beijing was merely responding to a series of restrictive actions initiated by Washington (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025).

The timeline below illustrates the rapid escalation in late September and October 2025:

Date (Approx.)	Action by United States	Action by China
Late Sept. 2025	Expanded the number of Chinese tech entities on its export control list, increasing pressure on China’s technology sector (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025).	President Xi warned President Trump in a phone call against imposing “unilateral trade restrictions” that could undermine negotiations (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025).
Oct. 9, 2025	N/A	China’s Ministry of Commerce announced it would retaliate against recent U.S. export controls, signaling a hardening stance (VnExpress, 2025).

Date (Approx.)	Action by United States	Action by China
Mid-Oct. 2025	President Trump publicly threatened 100% tariffs and suggested the APEC meeting with President Xi might be canceled (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025).	China tightened controls on rare earth exports, a move targeting a key U.S. supply chain vulnerability (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025).

This cycle of action and reaction created immense uncertainty, with both sides seemingly digging in their heels. The brinkmanship raised the stakes for the APEC summit, transforming it from a potential venue for a trade deal into a critical juncture to prevent a full-blown economic confrontation (Diễn Đàn Doanh Nghiệp, 2025).

Diplomatic Maneuvering and Last-Minute De-escalation Efforts

Amidst the escalating rhetoric and retaliatory trade measures, both Washington and Beijing engaged in frantic, last-minute diplomatic efforts to salvage the planned summit and pull the relationship back from the brink. These maneuvers were characterized by a mixture of public posturing and behind-the-scenes negotiations, reflecting the high stakes involved. The primary goal was to create enough common ground to ensure the meeting between the two leaders would be productive, or at the very least, prevent a public and damaging failure (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025).

A crucial component of this effort was a planned meeting in Malaysia between U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, scheduled just days before the APEC summit. This high-level dialogue was intended as a final, intensive push to de-escalate tensions and lay the groundwork for the leaders' discussion. The choice of a neutral venue like Malaysia, following earlier rounds of difficult talks in European cities such as Geneva and Stockholm, highlighted the need for a less politically charged environment to find a path forward (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025).

However, the path to the summit remained fraught with uncertainty, largely due to inconsistent signals from Washington. U.S. officials made public statements suggesting the Trump-Xi meeting was in jeopardy, only for the White House to reverse course and confirm its commitment shortly thereafter. For instance, on the morning of October 23, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt formally announced that President Trump would indeed participate in the bilateral meeting, putting an end to speculation that the U.S. might pull out (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025). This pattern of contradictory messaging was interpreted by some analysts as a negotiation tactic, but it also reflected a genuine lack of internal consensus within the U.S. administration and contributed to global market anxiety (Diễn Đàn Doanh Nghiệp, 2025).

A significant de-escalation move came from the U.S. side when Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent revealed that the administration would temporarily postpone the threatened 100% tariffs on Chinese goods until after the leaders' meeting. This decision was a critical concession that provided the necessary political space for the summit to proceed. It signaled to Beijing that Washington was willing to pause its campaign of maximum pressure in the interest of dialogue (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025). In a reciprocal gesture of goodwill, China made a commitment on October 27 to purchase a large quantity of U.S. soybeans, a move aimed at warming trade relations and creating a more favorable atmosphere for the upcoming talks (VietnamPlus, 2025). These gestures, while not resolving the core disputes, were essential in lowering the temperature and ensuring that both leaders could meet without the immediate threat of further economic warfare looming over the discussions.

The Strategic Calculus of Both Nations Amidst Rising Friction

The intense pre-summit friction was not merely a series of random escalations but was rooted in the distinct strategic calculations of both the United States and China. Each side employed carefully considered tactics designed to maximize its leverage and achieve its objectives, reflecting a deep understanding of the other's political dynamics and leadership style.

China's strategy was described by observers as “vừa cương vừa nhu,” a Vietnamese phrase meaning a combination of “hard and soft” approaches. This dual-track strategy involved simultaneously appealing to President Trump's self-image as a master dealmaker while demonstrating China's unwavering resolve and capacity to retaliate forcefully. On the one hand, Chinese policymakers believed that Trump was fundamentally a transactional leader, not an ideologue, and that his desire for a “win” could be used to neutralize more hawkish elements within his administration (VnExpress, 2025). On the other hand, Beijing understood that President Trump respected strength and unpredictability. Therefore, China's decision to respond decisively to U.S. export controls with its own restrictions on rare earths was a calculated move to show it would not back down. This approach was designed to project power and earn Trump's respect, which Chinese strategists believed was more effective than making unilateral concessions (VnExpress, 2025). As one scholar at Renmin University noted, China had become “fully prepared—understanding the ‘art of the deal’ and where America's weaknesses lie” (Báo Quốc Tế, 2025).

The United States, under President Trump, operated on a strategy of maximum pressure. The core of this approach was to create a crisis—threatening massive tariffs and even the cancellation of the summit—to force concessions from Beijing. This tactic was consistent with Trump's long-standing negotiation style of making extreme opening demands to shift the negotiating parameters in his favor. The White House's official position was that these aggressive measures were necessary to restore American industries and fulfill the President's “America First” commitment (VnExpress, 2025). However, this strategy also carried significant risks. The constant threats and inconsistent messaging created instability and risked pushing China into a corner, potentially leading to a complete breakdown in talks. The decision to ultimately postpone the 100% tariff threat demonstrated a recognition that this pressure had to be paired

Divergent Official Narratives of the Outcome

Following the 40-minute bilateral meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping on October 30, 2025, in Busan, South Korea, the official communications from Washington and Beijing presented markedly different interpretations of the summit's achievements. While both sides acknowledged positive movement, the framing, emphasis, and level of detail in their respective narratives revealed divergent strategic priorities and communication styles aimed at distinct domestic and international audiences. The American narrative, led by President Trump, projected a decisive victory and a concrete “deal,” whereas the Chinese portrayal was one of a measured, procedural step in a long-term strategic dialogue.

Framing the Summit's Success: “Breakthrough Deal” vs. “Constructive Dialogue”

The most significant divergence in the post-summit narratives was the fundamental characterization of the meeting's outcome. The Trump administration immediately framed the talks as a resounding success, culminating in a tangible agreement that served American interests. President Trump himself described the meeting in superlative terms, rating it as “trên cả điểm 10” (“better than a 10 out of 10”) and declaring it a “very successful” engagement that would soon lead to the signing of a formal agreement (cand.com.vn; bbc.com). This rhetoric aligns with a communication strategy consistently employed by the administration, which seeks to project strength and decisive leadership. This approach is particularly resonant with a domestic political base that responds to clear “wins” in international negotiations, a context underscored by polling data from the period showing that a majority of Republicans view Trump as a “strong leader who should be given the power he needs to restore America's greatness” (prri.org). By declaring a major deal had been struck, the administration aimed to demonstrate progress in the contentious U.S.-China trade relationship and deliver on campaign promises.

In stark contrast, the official Chinese narrative was far more restrained and procedural. Chinese state media, including the Xinhua News Agency, described the meeting as an opportunity to “exchange views on bilateral relations and other issues of common interest” (plo.vn). This language avoids the finality of the word “deal,” instead positioning the talks as a single, constructive step within an ongoing and complex relationship. President Xi's opening remarks, in which he noted that it is “unavoidable” for the two countries to have disagreements, further set a tone of pragmatic management rather than revolutionary breakthrough

(baoquocte.vn). This framing serves multiple purposes for Beijing: it avoids the appearance of capitulating to U.S. pressure, preserves flexibility for future negotiations, and portrays President Xi as a steady, responsible statesman navigating global challenges. The narrative of a “dialogue” rather than a “deal” allows China to present its commitments as proactive measures to stabilize relations, not as concessions extracted by Washington.

The Tariff Reduction Quid Pro Quo: American Specificity and Chinese Ambiguity

The divergence was particularly evident in the details of the purported agreement. The U.S. side provided specific, quantifiable metrics for its concessions. President Trump announced that he had agreed to a 10% reduction in tariffs on Chinese goods, which would lower the total average U.S. tariff level on Chinese imports to approximately 47%. He also specified that tariffs on items related to the illicit fentanyl trade would be reduced to 10% (vietnamplus.vn). This numerical specificity was designed to present the agreement as concrete and immediately verifiable for an American audience, particularly businesses and consumers impacted by the trade war.

Conversely, Chinese official reports and statements focused on their commitments without explicitly linking them as a direct quid pro quo for the U.S. tariff reductions. Beijing confirmed it would take several actions, but framed them as part of a broader effort to manage bilateral ties. This approach allows China to maintain that its policy decisions are sovereign and not dictated by U.S. tariff policy. The table below illustrates the difference in emphasis and framing of the key outcomes.

Outcome Component	U.S. Official Narrative (Framed as a “Deal”)	Chinese Official Narrative (Framed as “Consensus”)
— — —	Tariffs A specific 10% reduction on Chinese imports was agreed upon, lowering the total to ~47% (vietnamplus.vn). Acknowledged U.S. tariff action but did not publicly frame it as the direct trigger for its own commitments. The focus was on mutual efforts to de-escalate.	
	Agriculture China’s commitment to resume buying U.S. soybeans was presented as a major concession won for American farmers (cand.com.vn). Resuming soybean purchases was portrayed as a practical step to meet domestic demand and a gesture of goodwill to stabilize trade relations (vietnamplus.vn).	
	Fentanyl China’s pledge to crack down on illicit fentanyl trafficking was highlighted as a key U.S. victory on a critical domestic security issue (cand.com.vn). Presented as an area of shared interest and responsible global citizenship, rather than a concession to the U.S. (vietnamplus.vn).	
	Rare Earths Secured a commitment from Beijing to maintain the export of rare earths, ensuring stable supply for U.S. industry (cand.com.vn). Characterized as a one-year postponement of new licensing rules, implying a temporary measure subject to future review, not a permanent guarantee (plo.vn).	

This difference in presentation suggests that while a mutual understanding was reached, the two sides disagreed on its contractual nature. The U.S. presented it as a binding transaction, while China portrayed it as a set of parallel, goodwill actions.

The Narrative on Rare Earths: A Concession or a Strategic Pause?

The issue of rare earth minerals provides a clear case study in narrative divergence. The American narrative presented the outcome as a straightforward win: China committed to maintaining its supply of rare earths to the U.S. for one year, with the possibility of extension (vietnamplus.vn). This was framed as defusing a significant economic threat, as these minerals are critical for defense and technology manufacturing.

However, reports reflecting the Chinese position offered a more nuanced and strategic interpretation. The Chinese commitment was not to simply maintain supply, but rather to “hoãn triển khai quy định cấp phép đối với khoáng sản và nam châm đất hiếm thêm một năm” (postpone the implementation of licensing regulations for rare earth minerals and magnets for another year) while the policy is reviewed (plo.vn). This phrasing is critically different. It reframes the action from a guarantee of supply (a concession) to a temporary pause in tightening export controls (a strategic delay). This narrative allows Beijing to retain leverage, signaling that the restrictions could still be implemented after the one-year period if relations do not continue to improve. It presents China as a nation acting with deliberation and maintaining control over its strategic resources,

rather than one forced to abandon its policies under American pressure. This subtle distinction underscores China's long-term strategic thinking versus the American focus on an immediate, headline-grabbing result.

Strategic Omissions and Unresolved Issues

What was left unsaid by each side was as telling as what was said. The U.S. narrative, as reported by observers, explicitly noted that several highly sensitive and contentious issues were not addressed in the 40-minute meeting. These included the future of TikTok's U.S. operations and restrictions on advanced semiconductors, such as Nvidia's Blackwell AI chips (vietnamplus.vn). By acknowledging these omissions, the Trump administration preemptively managed expectations, signaling that while a trade-focused deal was achieved, the broader technological and national security competition remains unresolved. This allows the administration to claim a victory on the economic front while maintaining a tough stance on technology and security for its domestic audience.

The Chinese official narrative, by contrast, made no mention of these omissions. This silence serves a different purpose. By not highlighting the unresolved technology issues in the context of the summit, Beijing avoids elevating them as obstacles to the positive momentum generated by the meeting. It allows the Chinese government to focus its public messaging on the areas of cooperation and de-escalation, projecting an image of a relationship that is being responsibly managed despite underlying differences. This approach aligns with a diplomatic strategy of "shelving differences" to focus on areas of potential agreement. The U.S. highlights the unresolved conflicts to demonstrate its vigilance, while China ignores them in its public narrative to emphasize stability and progress. This difference in communication strategy reflects their distinct approaches to the multifaceted competition between the two powers.

U.S. Perspective: President Trump's Declaration

White House Framing of a Historic Diplomatic TriumphThe Trump administration has framed "The Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity" as a monumental achievement, attributing its success directly to the President's personal leadership and diplomatic skill. Official White House communications portray the agreement not merely as a ceasefire but as a foundational document for a new era in the Middle East. A White House article titled "Widespread Acclaim for President Trump's Diplomatic Triumph" describes the outcome as the culmination of President Donald J. Trump's "indomitable resolve and masterful diplomacy," resulting in the release of all hostages and an end to the Gaza conflict (Widespread Acclaim for President Trump's Diplomatic Triumph, 2025). The administration heralded the event as a "generational victory for peace" that would usher in a new era for a region historically beset by conflict.

The official text of the declaration, released as a Presidential Memoranda on October 13, 2025, emphasizes a forward-looking vision. It speaks of opening "a new chapter for the region defined by hope, security, and a shared vision for peace and prosperity" (The Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity, 2025). The language used is broad and aspirational, committing signatories to implement the agreement to ensure "peace, security, stability, and opportunity for all peoples of the region, including both Palestinians and Israelis." This framing strategically positions the declaration as a comprehensive solution that protects the "fundamental human rights," "security," and "dignity" of both peoples. The U.S. Embassy in Qatar echoed this messaging, publishing the declaration and highlighting the commitment to end "more than two years of profound suffering and loss" (The Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity, 2025). The administration's narrative is one of decisive action and historic breakthrough, a theme consistently reinforced through its official channels.

Bipartisan Political Acclaim

A key element of the U.S. perspective, heavily promoted by the White House, is the widespread and bipartisan praise the agreement received from prominent American political figures. The administration highlighted a "diverse, bipartisan coalition of former Presidents, world leaders, experts, journalists, and others" who

united in praise of the achievement (Widespread Acclaim for President Trump’s Diplomatic Triumph, 2025). This narrative of unity is significant in a typically polarized U.S. political environment.

Former President Joe Biden, Trump’s predecessor, commended the administration, stating, “I commend President Trump and his team for their work to get a renewed ceasefire deal over the finish line.” Similarly, former President Bill Clinton gave “great credit” to President Trump, his administration, and regional partners for their persistence in reaching the agreement. This praise from Democratic predecessors was presented as evidence of the deal’s undeniable significance.

Support from the Republican side was equally, if not more, effusive. Former Vice President Mike Pence credited the return of all 20 living hostages to the “steadfast leadership of President Donald Trump” and commended his “relentless pursuit of peace.” The Republican Jewish Coalition lauded the event with an “historic address for the ages,” cementing Trump’s legacy as “the most pro-Israel President in U.S. history, and as the Peacemaker President” (Widespread Acclaim for President Trump’s Diplomatic Triumph, 2025).

Political Figure	Affiliation	Statement Summary	Source
Joe Biden	Democrat (Former President)	Commended President Trump and his team for their work on the ceasefire deal.	White House
Bill Clinton	Democrat (Former President)	Gave “great credit” to President Trump and his administration for their engagement.	White House
Mike Pence	Republican (Former Vice President)	Credited the return of hostages to Trump’s “steadfast leadership.”	White House
Republican Jewish Coalition	Republican Organization	Called it an “historic address” cementing Trump’s legacy as a “Peacemaker President.”	White House

This curated collection of bipartisan endorsements forms the cornerstone of the administration’s domestic messaging, aiming to portray the declaration not as a partisan victory but as a national and international success.

Media and Expert Analysis: A Mix of Praise and Scrutiny

The U.S. perspective on the declaration, as seen through media and expert commentary, is multifaceted, ranging from effusive praise for President Trump’s personal style to deep skepticism about the agreement’s substance. The White House actively compiled and promoted positive commentary. For instance, ABC News Chief International Correspondent James Longman was quoted as being “mostly struck by is Donald Trump’s sheer force of personality,” suggesting that his unique approach was a key factor in the breakthrough (Widespread Acclaim for President Trump’s Diplomatic Triumph, 2025). Similarly, Josh Rogin of The Washington Post credited Trump for “realizing that America actually has the power to pressure both the Arab countries and Israel to do things that are in their shared interest.” Legal scholar Alan Dershowitz praised Trump’s “brilliant diplomacy” for freeing hostages and implementing a ceasefire, calling it a “great accomplishment” and a potential “stepping stone to a more enduring and somewhat warmer peace” (Widespread Acclaim for President Trump’s Diplomatic Triumph, 2025). The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, stated that the administration had “brought new hope for lasting peace.”

However, reporting from other major U.S. news outlets offered a more cautious and critical perspective. The New York Times highlighted the ambiguity surrounding the agreement, running a headline that read, “Trump Touts ‘Very Important Signing,’ but Details Are Few.” The article noted that despite the “big production”

in Egypt, “what is actually demanded from its signatories in the document they signed remains unclear” (Trump Touts ‘Very Important Signing,’ but Details Are Few, 2025). President Trump’s own description of the document as something that would “spell out a lot of rules and regulations and lots of other things” did little to clarify its specific commitments. ABC News characterized the memorandum as “largely symbolic,” suggesting that while it laid out broad commitments, it lacked concrete, enforceable mechanisms (Trump, world leaders gather in Egypt for ceasefire deal signing with Netanyahu absent, 2025). This divergence in media portrayal illustrates a central tension in the U.S. perspective: whether the declaration is a substantive, game-changing peace accord or a symbolic gesture built around presidential pageantry.

The 20-Point Plan and Its Ambiguities

While the signed declaration itself was light on specifics, the U.S. perspective is informed by a more detailed 20-point peace plan unveiled by President Trump at the White House on September 29, 2025 (Donald Trump’s 20-point Gaza peace plan in full, 2025). This plan provides the underlying framework for the U.S. approach and reveals both the administration’s goals and the significant challenges that remain. The plan’s first points are ambitious, calling for Gaza to become a “deradicalised terror-free zone” and for its redevelopment “for the benefit of the people of Gaza.” It stipulates an immediate end to the war and a withdrawal of Israeli forces once both sides agree to the proposal, followed by the return of all hostages within 72 hours.

However, the plan contains several points that are sources of ambiguity and potential future conflict. A key requirement is the disarmament of Hamas, a condition the group did not explicitly agree to when it accepted the initial hostage-prisoner exchange terms (Donald Trump’s 20-point Gaza peace plan in full, 2025). This remains a major unresolved issue. Furthermore, the plan’s vision for the future governance of Gaza is vague. It proposes a temporary transitional government body, led by Palestinians and supported by the U.S. and other nations, to oversee public services. This body would be responsible for security and preventing the resurgence of terrorism, but the mechanics of its formation and its long-term authority are not clearly defined (Trump and World Leaders Sign ‘Enduring Peace’ Pact Aimed at Ending Gaza War, 2025). From a U.S. policy perspective, these ambiguities represent significant hurdles to achieving the “strong, durable, and everlasting peace” that President Trump has promised.

The Unresolved Question of Palestinian Statehood

A central and contentious issue within the U.S. perspective on the peace declaration is the future of Palestinian self-determination and statehood. Despite the declaration’s language about ensuring opportunity for “all peoples of the region,” the agreement and the administration’s subsequent commentary have been conspicuously silent or noncommittal on the long-standing U.S. policy goal of a two-state solution. TIME magazine noted that the agreement contains “no mention of plans towards a Palestinian State that is recognised by the United States” (Trump and World Leaders Sign ‘Enduring Peace’ Pact Aimed at Ending Gaza War, 2025).

President Trump’s own statements have amplified this uncertainty. When asked by reporters about a two-state solution at the signing ceremony, he was evasive, stating, “We’ll have to see.” He elaborated, “I’m not talking about a single-state or double-state or two-state. A lot of people like the one-state solution, some people like the two-state solution. We’ll have to see” (Trump and World Leaders Sign ‘Enduring Peace’ Pact Aimed at Ending Gaza War, 2025). This public ambivalence marks a significant departure from the positions of previous U.S. administrations and introduces a major element of unpredictability into the future of the peace process. While Trump’s 20-point plan suggests that during Gaza’s redevelopment “the conditions may finally be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood,” his reluctance to endorse the two-state framework publicly leaves the ultimate U.S. position unclear. This ambiguity, coupled with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s long-standing opposition to a Palestinian state, leaves the core political conflict unresolved, casting a shadow over the declaration’s promise of “enduring peace.”

Chinese Perspective: President Xi's Call for Stability

A Conciliatory Tone: Xi's Diplomatic Framing From the outset of the meeting in South Korea, Chinese President Xi Jinping adopted a markedly conciliatory and forward-looking tone, framing the talks as an opportunity to steer the U.S.-China relationship back toward a more stable course. In his opening remarks, Xi referred to President Trump as “a friend of mine” and noted that “it feels very warm seeing you again because it’s been many years” (Fox News, 2025). This personal framing was a deliberate diplomatic gesture aimed at soothing tensions that had escalated significantly in the preceding months. While acknowledging the inherent difficulties in the relationship, Xi downplayed them as manageable. He stated it was “normal for the two leading economies of the world to have frictions now and then,” suggesting that such disagreements were not insurmountable obstacles (CNBC, 2025).

Xi employed a powerful metaphor to describe the bilateral relationship, likening it to a “giant ship” or an ocean-going vessel. He urged both sides to work together to “ensure the steady sailing forward of the giant ship” and to “stay on the right course” (The Guardian, 2025). This imagery conveyed a sense of shared responsibility and mutual interest in preventing the relationship from veering into dangerous waters. The Chinese leader emphasized that the two nations “can still find ways to thrive side by side,” a direct appeal for coexistence over confrontation (Fox News, 2025). In what was seen as a particularly strategic move to appeal directly to his American counterpart, Xi’s official readout noted that “China’s development and revitalization goes hand in hand with President Trump’s vision to ‘Make America Great Again’” (CNBC, 2025). However, despite the warm rhetoric, some observers noted a contrast in his demeanor, describing it as “much less enthusiastic” and noting he was “barely smiling during the meeting” (Atlantic Council, 2025). This suggests a carefully calibrated performance, where conciliatory language was prioritized to create a constructive atmosphere, even if underlying tensions remained palpable.

Avoiding the “Vicious Cycle”: The Core Message of De-escalation

A central and recurring theme in President Xi’s messaging was the urgent need to halt the escalating trade conflict and avoid what he termed a “vicious cycle of mutual retaliation” (The New York Times, 2025). This phrase, highlighted in the official Chinese readout of the meeting and reported by multiple international news outlets, encapsulated Beijing’s primary objective for the summit: to establish a truce and create a more predictable economic environment. Xi stressed that both nations should adopt a long-term perspective and prioritize the benefits of cooperation over the destructive nature of an ongoing tariff war (The Guardian, 2025). This call for de-escalation was not merely rhetorical; it was directly linked to the tangible agreements that emerged from the talks.

The Chinese readout, while not detailing specific agreements, alluded to China’s recent retaliatory measures, such as the move to control exports of critical rare earth minerals (The New York Times, 2025). In line with Xi’s call to break the retaliatory cycle, China announced it would make “corresponding adjustments” to its countermeasures, including a one-year pause on its new curbs on rare earth exports (CNN, 2025). This move was presented as a significant concession and a direct response to the progress made during the discussions. Xi’s emphasis on dialogue over confrontation was further underscored in his reported remarks, where he stressed that past experiences in the relationship offered valuable lessons for the present (AP News, 2025). According to the Chinese statement, Xi conveyed that the two countries’ trade negotiation teams had already “reached a basic consensus on addressing our respective major concerns” in meetings the previous weekend, setting the stage for the leaders to finalize a truce (The Guardian, 2025). The focus on stopping retaliation was a pragmatic recognition that the escalating conflict was harming businesses on both sides and roiling the global economy, making stability a paramount national interest for Beijing (CNN, 2025).

The Official Narrative: State Media and Public Reaction

The Chinese government carefully managed the domestic narrative surrounding the Trump-Xi meeting, employing a strategy that evolved from initial downplaying to widespread, positive coverage. In the hours leading up to the talks, major state media outlets like CCTV focused on other national achievements, such as the latest Shenzhou-21 space mission, and highlighted Xi’s broader attendance at the Asia-Pacific

Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit rather than the specific bilateral meeting (CNBC, 2025). The Chinese foreign ministry did not even officially confirm the meeting would take place until the afternoon before the talks. However, once the two leaders met, official coverage ramped up significantly, with state broadcasters beginning to send regular, positive updates (CNBC, 2025).

This official narrative quickly permeated Chinese social media, where the meeting became a dominant topic of discussion. On Weibo, China's X-like platform, the hashtag "China-U.S. leaders' Busan Summit" became the top trending topic, garnering over 250 million views (CNN, 2025). The sentiment in the comments, though likely curated by state censors, was overwhelmingly optimistic. Users posted brief messages such as "Harmony between China and the US leads to global prosperity," "a historic moment," and "long live China-U.S. friendship" (CNBC, 2025). The focus was on the prospect of lowered tariffs and a return to stability, reflecting a public desire to see an end to the economically damaging trade war. One economist, writing on the social media app Xiaohongshu, expressed hope for the "early arrival of the China-U.S. honeymoon period" (CNBC, 2025). The controlled media environment ensures that the official perspective—one of successful, pragmatic diplomacy leading to a win-win outcome—was the primary one available to the Chinese public.

Strategic Ambiguity: What the Chinese Readout Omitted

A defining characteristic of the Chinese perspective on the summit was its strategic ambiguity, particularly in official communications. While President Trump was quick to announce specific outcomes to the press—rating the meeting a "12 on a scale of one to 10" and detailing a 10% drop in overall tariffs—the official Chinese readouts were far more circumspect (CNN, 2025). This approach is consistent with Beijing's traditional diplomatic practice, where the specifics of agreements are often not publicly discussed in the same manner as they are by U.S. presidents (The New York Times, 2025). The Chinese statement confirmed that the two sides had "reached a basic consensus" and made "encouraging progress," but it did not enumerate the precise terms of the trade truce (The Guardian, 2025). This vagueness allows Beijing to maintain flexibility in its implementation and to frame the outcome domestically without being locked into the specifics articulated by the U.S. side.

Perhaps the most significant omission from the discussions and the subsequent readouts was the issue of Taiwan. In previous high-level meetings, Xi has consistently stressed the importance of Taiwan to China, which it claims as its own territory. However, in this instance, the topic was not raised. President Trump confirmed to reporters that "the issue of Taiwan did not come up in their talks," a fact corroborated by the absence of any mention of it in the Chinese readout (The New York Times, 2025). This strategic silence suggests a deliberate choice by Xi to prioritize the immediate goal of economic de-escalation over pressing China's core territorial claims. By avoiding this highly sensitive and contentious issue, Xi ensured the focus remained squarely on trade and stability, preventing a potential point of diplomatic friction from derailing the fragile progress being made. This calculated omission highlights Beijing's pragmatic approach, shelving long-term geopolitical ambitions to address the more pressing short-term economic crisis (Atlantic Council, 2025).

A Pragmatic Path Forward: Future Engagements and Cooperation Beyond securing an immediate truce, the Chinese perspective framed the Busan meeting as a crucial step toward re-establishing a more structured and predictable framework for future engagement. The official Chinese readout confirmed concrete plans for continued high-level diplomacy, including President Trump's acceptance of an invitation to visit China in April and a reciprocal visit by President Xi to the United States later in the year (The New York Times, 2025). These scheduled visits signal a mutual commitment to maintaining open lines of communication at the highest level, a key element of Beijing's strategy to manage the relationship and prevent future misunderstandings from spiraling into open conflict. Analysts noted that the breakthrough sets the stage for "deeper, more predictable engagement heading into 2026" (BBC, 2025).

President Xi also outlined a broader agenda for potential U.S.-China cooperation, extending beyond the immediate trade disputes. According to reports on the Chinese position, he listed a range of transnational issues where the two countries could work together, including combating illegal immigration, telecom fraud,

anti-money laundering efforts, developing governance for artificial intelligence, and handling infectious diseases (AP News, 2025). By highlighting these areas of shared interest, Xi sought to demonstrate that the relationship has cooperative dimensions that can serve as a ballast against the more competitive aspects. From Beijing’s viewpoint, the meeting was a success because it achieved key domestic goals: stabilizing a volatile economic relationship and creating a pathway for continued dialogue. As one analyst observed, the meeting was a reminder that “even amid rivalry between great powers, pragmatism grounded in national interest can pave the way for meaningful engagement” (BBC, 2025). This pragmatic approach underscores China’s view of the summit not as a final resolution, but as a necessary and successful maneuver to manage a “structurally fractious relationship” for the foreseeable future.

Expert Analysis: A Tactical Pause

The Architecture of a Temporary Truce

Analysts widely concur that the agreement reached between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping is not a comprehensive resolution to the trade war but rather a carefully constructed, temporary truce designed for short-term gains (VietnamPlus, 2025a). The very structure of the deal, with its explicit one-year timeframe for key provisions, underscores its nature as a tactical pause rather than a strategic peace. President Trump himself provided conflicting statements, first suggesting the deal would “last a long time” before clarifying, “This is a one-year agreement, and we will extend it after that,” a sentiment that reveals the built-in expectation of future renegotiation and potential instability (Soha, 2025a).

The deal focuses on what Professor Kam of the University of Technology Sydney described as the “easier to solve” issues, creating a transactional exchange of immediate concessions (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025a). This approach allows both sides to claim victory without tackling the deeper, more intractable sources of conflict. The agreement’s key components were a direct quid pro quo: the U.S. offered tariff relief in exchange for Chinese commitments on specific trade and law enforcement issues. This transactional nature is a hallmark of a temporary de-escalation, where mutual interests align for a brief period before underlying strategic competition re-emerges. Experts warn that precisely because the deal avoids the core disputes, any truce between the U.S. and China is unlikely to “last forever” (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025a). The following table outlines the specific, time-bound concessions that form the foundation of this tactical pause.

U.S. Concessions	Chinese Concessions	Duration / Conditions	Source
Reduce tariffs on Chinese goods by 10%, lowering the total average rate to approx. 47%.	Resume imports of U.S. soybeans (commitment for 12 million tons in the current crop year).	Not explicitly time-bound but subject to ongoing relations.	VietnamPlus, 2025b
Reduce import tariffs on fentanyl-related items to 10%.	Increase enforcement against the illicit fentanyl trade.	Not explicitly time-bound but a key U.S. demand.	Cand.com.vn, 2025
Temporarily halt new regulations targeting a specific Chinese subsidiary.	Suspend new restrictions on the export of strategic rare earth minerals.	One-year term, subject to renewal.	Soha, 2025b
Suspend special port fees on Chinese vessels docking at U.S. ports.	Reciprocal suspension of similar fees.	One-year term.	Soha, 2025b

This framework, with its emphasis on one-year renewals, creates an environment of managed uncertainty. It provides immediate relief for businesses and markets but institutionalizes an annual cycle of high-stakes negotiations, ensuring that the trade conflict remains a central and recurring feature of the U.S.-China relationship.

Strategic Imperatives Driving De-escalation

The timing of the Busan summit and the resulting agreement was not accidental, according to analysts, but driven by pressing strategic and domestic imperatives for both Washington and Beijing. The meeting was seen as a necessary step to “narrow the risks” of any sudden, destabilizing decisions in the coming months, particularly as previous trade deals were set to expire on November 10, creating a hard deadline for action (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025a; Viettimes, 2025). For President Trump, the summit offered a chance to secure a tangible “win” to present to the American public, particularly farmers in key agricultural states who have been heavily impacted by the loss of the Chinese soybean market. The resumption of soybean purchases and China’s commitments on fentanyl—a major domestic political issue in the U.S.—provide immediate, headline-grabbing results that align with Trump’s desire for quick, demonstrable outcomes (Cand.com.vn, 2025).

For China, the motivations for a pause are equally compelling. The Chinese economy faces significant internal headwinds, and a reduction in U.S. tariffs, even a modest one, provides welcome relief to its export-oriented manufacturing sector. Furthermore, securing a one-year guarantee on the supply of rare earths and a suspension of new U.S. regulations provides a degree of predictability for its strategic industries (Soha, 2025b). The meeting itself, the first direct encounter between the two leaders in six years, serves a crucial diplomatic purpose for Beijing. It allows President Xi to project an image of stable, pragmatic leadership on the world stage, positioning China as a reasonable actor willing to negotiate and cooperate. This helps counter the narrative of escalating confrontation and provides Beijing with valuable time to pursue its long-term economic and technological goals without the immediate pressure of ever-increasing trade restrictions. Professor Tim Harcourt from the University of Technology Sydney framed the meeting in even broader terms, suggesting it was a pivotal moment to “reshape globalization in the post-Covid era,” indicating that both nations felt the pressure to stabilize a global system rocked by years of tariffs and uncertainty (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025a).

Core Technological and Ideological Conflicts Unaddressed

A key reason experts universally view the Busan agreement as a tactical pause is the conspicuous absence of any discussion on the most fundamental and contentious issues at the heart of the U.S.-China rivalry. The dialogue was carefully curated to focus on transactional trade items while deliberately sidestepping the deep-seated competition over technology, security, and ideology (VietnamPlus, 2025b). President Trump made no mention of progress on two of the most sensitive topics: the future of the Chinese-owned social media app TikTok in the U.S. and American export controls on advanced semiconductors, such as Nvidia’s Blackwell AI chips. These issues represent the core of the technological “decoupling” debate and are seen by Washington as critical national security concerns.

Beijing, for its part, had a list of demands that were not met, including the lifting of U.S. export controls on sensitive technology and the removal of tariffs related to its industrial policies (Viettimes, 2025). The failure to address these points indicates that the chasm between the two sides on the future of technology and global supply chains remains as wide as ever. The agreement on soybeans and fentanyl is relatively simple, whereas the conflict over technology involves complex issues of intellectual property, national security, and the race for global dominance in the 21st century. By avoiding these topics, the leaders secured a temporary calm but left the primary drivers of the conflict to fester. This strategic omission ensures that while trade in agricultural goods may stabilize for a year, the “tech war” will continue unabated, likely leading to future confrontations once the political utility of the current truce has expired. The deal effectively places a bandage on a superficial wound while ignoring the critical underlying condition.

Trump’s “Quick Strike” Diplomacy vs. China’s Long Game

The Busan agreement is seen by many analysts as a classic example of President Trump’s distinct diplomatic style, which has been described as a “đánh nhanh, rút gọn” (quick strike, quick withdrawal) strategy (Dân trí, 2025a). This approach, observed in his handling of conflicts in the Middle East, prioritizes demonstrating strength through decisive action and then quickly pivoting to negotiations to claim a victory and avoid prolonged entanglement. As noted by expert Vali Nasr, “Trump has always wanted the U.S. to show strength

without having to pay the price of long-term wars” (Dân trí, 2025a). In the context of the trade war, the years of escalating tariffs served as the “quick strike,” inflicting economic pain on China. The Busan meeting represents the “quick withdrawal” into a deal-making phase, allowing him to declare the meeting a “12 out of 10” success and announce a tangible agreement, however temporary it may be (Soha, 2025a).

This strategy can also be viewed through the lens of creating a “sự đã rồi” (fait accompli), a tactic Trump employed in Gaza peace negotiations (VnExpress, 2025). By announcing a deal is in place, he generates immense pressure on the other party to follow through and solidifies a narrative of success. His declaration that “we have a deal” on trade with China, made before all complexities are resolved, fits this pattern. This approach contrasts sharply with what is often perceived as China’s more patient, long-term strategic orientation. While Trump seeks immediate, transactional wins, Beijing is often seen as playing a longer game, willing to absorb short-term costs to achieve its overarching goals of technological self-sufficiency and regional dominance. By agreeing to this tactical pause, China buys itself another year of relative stability to advance these long-term objectives, weathering the storm of Trump’s disruptive tactics while ceding little on its core strategic interests. The dynamic, therefore, is one of a U.S. leader focused on a short-term, politically advantageous truce and a Chinese leader leveraging that desire for a pause to further a multi-decade strategic vision.

Domestic Motivations for De-escalation

Economic Imperatives and Trade War Fallout

The Trump administration’s willingness to de-escalate tensions with China is heavily influenced by pressing domestic economic concerns, particularly the looming expiration of a fragile trade detente and the potential impact of further tariff escalations. A temporary trade truce between the two economic superpowers is set to expire on November 10, 2025. Failure to secure an extension or a new agreement would trigger significant economic uncertainty (CNBC, 2025). Compounding this pressure is a self-imposed deadline by President Trump of November 1, 2025, for the implementation of an additional 100% tariff on Chinese goods, a threat that analysts believe the administration may be hesitant to enforce due to the potential for severe economic blowback (CNBC, 2025).

The agricultural sector, a key political constituency for President Trump, remains a central focus of the negotiations and a powerful domestic motivator for reaching a deal. Trump has explicitly stated that he expects to reach an agreement with President Xi Jinping over soybean purchases during their meeting in South Korea (CNBC, 2025). China’s agreement to increase purchases of U.S. soybeans was a key outcome of the meeting, according to Trump’s post-summit remarks, indicating the high priority placed on this issue (Atlantic Council, 2025). The emphasis on agricultural products reflects the administration’s awareness of the economic pain inflicted on American farmers by the prolonged trade war and the political necessity of delivering tangible benefits to this group.

The broader business community has also been grappling with the instability caused by the “tit-for-tat restrictions” that have characterized the U.S.-China relationship. These measures have included hefty port fees, expanded export controls, and restrictions on critical materials like rare earth minerals, creating an unpredictable environment for American companies (CNBC, 2025). While policy experts note that a temporary truce fails to address underlying structural issues like China’s industrial overcapacity, for many U.S. businesses, any de-escalation that restores “a measure of calm” is a welcome development (CNBC, 2025). The confirmation of the Trump-Xi meeting was itself seen by analysts as a signal of intent to put negotiations back on track, driven by a mutual desire to avoid further economic damage (CNBC, 2025).

Economic Pressure Point	Administration’s Desired Outcome	Source
Nov. 10 Trade Detente Expiration	Extension of the truce or a new deal to avoid market volatility.	CNBC, 2025
Nov. 1 100% Tariff Deadline	Avoid enforcing the threat to prevent domestic economic harm.	CNBC, 2025

Economic Pressure Point	Administration’s Desired Outcome	Source
Supply Chain Instability	Pause on “tit-for-tat” restrictions (e.g., port fees, export controls).	CNBC, 2025

The Government Shutdown and “Project 2025” Agenda

A significant domestic factor shaping the administration’s approach to the China summit is the ongoing government shutdown and a renewed, public embrace of “Project 2025.” This conservative blueprint, which the Trump campaign sought to distance itself from during the 2024 election, outlines a radical restructuring of the federal government, including slashing the workforce (AP News, 2025). In the midst of the shutdown, President Trump has openly aligned himself with the project and its architects, such as Office of Management and Budget Director Russ Vought, whom Trump referred to as “he of PROJECT 2025 Fame” (AP News, 2025).

This domestic political battle provides a powerful incentive for seeking stability on the foreign policy front. The administration is using the shutdown to “accelerate his goals of slashing the size of the federal workforce and punishing Democratic states” (AP News, 2025). Engaging in a simultaneous, high-stakes escalation with China would risk stretching the administration’s political capital and distracting from its primary domestic objective. A de-escalation with Beijing, even a temporary one, allows the White House to project an image of presidential leadership and success on the world stage, potentially mitigating some of the negative political fallout from the shutdown. This creates political space for the administration to focus its energies on the domestic fight over the budget and the implementation of the Project 2025 agenda. The White House has deflected criticism of this strategy by accusing Democrats of “desperate[ly]... talk[ing] about anything aside from their decision to hurt the American people by shutting down the government” (AP News, 2025). A successful or even stable outcome from the Xi meeting serves as a powerful counter-narrative to accusations of domestic chaos.

Shifting Political Rhetoric and Dealmaker Persona

President Trump’s personal political brand as a master dealmaker is a core domestic driver for seeking a tangible agreement with China. After years of escalating tensions and hawkish rhetoric, the president has noticeably softened his tone in the days leading up to the summit. He has touted his “great relationship” with Xi and expressed confidence that the talks would yield a “good deal” (CNBC, 2025). On October 23, 2025, Trump told the public, “I think we are going to come out very well and everyone’s going to be very happy,” framing the meeting in terms of a definitive win for the United States (CNBC, 2025).

This shift is a strategic political calculation. Having returned to office in January 2025, the administration is keen to secure a major foreign policy victory early in its second term. The meeting with Xi is the first in-person encounter between the two leaders since 2019 and since Trump’s return to the presidency, making it a high-profile opportunity to demonstrate effectiveness (CNBC, 2025). After a contentious 2024 campaign where his opponents sought to use the more extreme proposals in Project 2025 against him, a successful diplomatic engagement offers a chance to pivot and project an image of pragmatic leadership (AP News, 2025). The president’s post-meeting enthusiasm, where he rated the summit a “twelve” on a scale of one to ten and called it “amazing,” underscores the importance of framing the outcome as a personal and national triumph for a domestic audience (Atlantic Council, 2025).### Pressure from Critical U.S. Industries Beyond the broad economic landscape, specific, strategically important U.S. industries are exerting pressure for a more stable and predictable relationship with China. The technology sector, in particular, has been caught in the crossfire of escalating export controls and supply chain vulnerabilities. The U.S. has imposed sweeping tech restrictions on China in recent years, prompting Beijing to double down on its drive for technological self-reliance (CNBC, 2025). In response, China has leveraged its dominance over rare earth minerals—materials critical for modern technology—as a bargaining chip. The prospect of China prioritizing rare earth approval for the U.S. was cited by analysts as a key potential concession in exchange for Washington relaxing some of its tech curbs (CNBC, 2025).

The administration has acknowledged these pressure points, with Trump listing rare earths as a top issue for discussion alongside fentanyl, soybeans, and Taiwan (CNBC, 2025). The post-summit announcement that Beijing would delay its planned rare earth curbs was presented as a major U.S. achievement, demonstrating the administration’s focus on securing relief for these critical industries (CNBC, 2025). Other issues, such as U.S. concerns over the Chinese ownership of the social media platform TikTok, also highlight the deep entanglement of the tech sector in the bilateral relationship (Atlantic Council, 2025). For these industries, a “high-risk, high-reward” meeting that hits the “reset button” is preferable to continued escalation, even if it results in a temporary truce rather than a comprehensive resolution of structural disputes (CNBC, 2025).

Personalized Diplomacy and Bypassing the Establishment

The Trump administration’s foreign policy methodology, which favors personalized, leader-to-leader engagement while shunning traditional diplomatic channels, is itself a domestic motivation for the summit. The second Trump administration has been described as one that ignores protocol and expert advice in favor of using “personally loyal and inexperienced envoys to solve problems with ‘common sense and hard-nosed savvy’” (Wikipedia, 2025). High-stakes tasks have been given to figures like real estate developer Steven Witkoff and the president’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, reflecting a deep-seated distrust of career diplomats and intelligence officers (The New York Times, 2025; Wikipedia, 2025).

A direct meeting with Xi Jinping is the ultimate expression of this approach. It allows President Trump to engage his counterpart directly, reinforcing his preferred image as the central figure in U.S. foreign policy. This method allows the administration to bypass the institutional bureaucracy of the State Department and other agencies, which are viewed by some within the administration as part of a “deep state” resistant to its agenda. By personally negotiating with Xi, Trump can claim any resulting agreement—no matter how fragile or temporary—as a direct personal victory. This aligns with a broader administrative pattern of dismantling or withdrawing support from organizations dedicated to traditional American diplomacy and soft power, such as USAID and Voice of America, in favor of a more transactional and hard-power-oriented approach (Wikipedia, 2025). The summit, therefore, is not just a tool for de-escalation but also a vehicle for executing a distinctly personalized and anti-establishment model of foreign policy that resonates with the administration’s domestic political base.

Future Trajectory and Enduring Strategic Competition

The “Tactical Pause” and Inherent Fragility of the Agreement

While the October 30, 2025, summit between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping produced a temporary de-escalation, analysts widely view the resulting agreements as a “tactical stop” rather than a fundamental resolution to the underlying conflicts (VietnamPlus, 2025). The consensus among experts is that no truce between the United States and China will last indefinitely, as the core drivers of their rivalry remain unaddressed (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025). The agreement is described as potentially “mong manh” (fragile), though it serves the immediate purpose of “narrowing the risks” of unexpected escalations in the coming months (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025).

The very structure of the deal underscores its provisional nature. President Trump explicitly stated that the agreement would be subject to annual renegotiation, a framework that introduces inherent instability and reflects a transactional approach to diplomacy (CNN, 2025). This approach is consistent with President Trump’s established negotiating style, which has seen him alter positions on tariffs numerous times in the past, casting doubt on the long-term adherence to any single agreement (VietnamPlus, 2025). Professor Chong Ja Ian of the National University of Singapore noted that strictly adhering to agreements does not appear to be part of President Trump’s strategy, further reinforcing the perception that this truce is a temporary reprieve (VietnamPlus, 2025).

President Xi also alluded to the potential for future conflict, urging both sides to avoid falling into a “vicious cycle of retaliation” and to focus on the bigger picture of long-term interests (Báo Pháp Luật TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 2025). His call for continued dialogue on the basis of “equality and mutual respect” to shorten the list of disagreements suggests an acknowledgment that significant points of friction persist beyond the scope

of the current deal (Báo Pháp Luật TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 2025). Ultimately, the summit is seen as a necessary but insufficient step toward managing a complex relationship, offering a vital channel for dialogue but failing to resolve the deeper strategic contest (One World Outlook, 2025).

Beyond Tariffs: The Unresolved Contest for Technological and Global InfluenceThe summit’s focus on tariffs, soybeans, and fentanyl, while significant, only scratches the surface of the multifaceted competition between the U.S. and China. Expert analysis emphasizes that the core of the rivalry is not merely economic but strategic, encompassing a clash over development models, technological supremacy, and global influence (VietnamPlus, 2025). The structural causes of tension—including technological competition, military posturing, and ideological differences—run deep and were not resolved by the meeting in South Korea (One World Outlook, 2025).

The competition is particularly fierce in advanced manufacturing sectors that rely on critical inputs like rare earth minerals and semiconductors (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025). While President Trump announced that issues surrounding U.S. access to rare earths were “resolved,” the one-year suspension of China’s export curbs is a temporary measure, not a permanent solution (CNN, 2025). This highlights the strategic leverage China holds in key supply chains and the ongoing U.S. vulnerability that drives efforts toward economic decoupling and supply chain diversification. The mention that Beijing would negotiate directly with U.S. chip designer Nvidia also points to the centrality of the technology sector in bilateral relations, where national security and economic interests are deeply intertwined (BBC News Tiếng Việt, 2025).

This broader strategic rivalry is shaping a new era of great power competition (Dan Viet, 2025). The summit’s outcomes will resonate far beyond bilateral trade, influencing alliance systems, defense postures, and global governance frameworks as both Washington and Beijing vie for influence across the Indo-Pacific and beyond (One World Outlook, 2025). The table below illustrates the contrast between the summit’s short-term tactical agreements and the enduring strategic challenges that will define the future trajectory of U.S.-China relations.

Summit Agreement (Short-Term Tactic)	Enduring Strategic Competition (Long-Term Trajectory)
U.S. reduces overall tariffs on Chinese goods from 57% to 47% (CNN, 2025).	Ongoing efforts by both nations to achieve economic self-sufficiency and reduce strategic dependencies.
China suspends new curbs on rare earth exports for one year (CNN, 2025).	Long-term U.S. and allied push to build alternative supply chains for critical minerals to counter Chinese dominance.
China resumes purchases of U.S. soybeans and cracks down on fentanyl (Báo Công an Nhân dân, 2025).	Persistent competition over technological standards (e.g., AI, 5G) and control of global data flows.
Reopening of high-level dialogue channels between the two leaders (One World Outlook, 2025).	Deep ideological differences and a clash of governance models that fuels mutual distrust and strategic rivalry.

The “Trump 2.0” Doctrine: Negotiation from Strength and Perpetual Uncertainty

The future trajectory of U.S.-China relations under the second Trump administration is expected to be characterized by a doctrine of negotiating from a position of strength, a philosophy that prioritizes tactical gains over long-term structural agreements (Dan Viet, 2025). President Trump’s assessment of the meeting as “12 out of 10” and his declaration that a deal was reached on “almost everything” reflects his focus on tangible, immediate concessions like tariff reductions and agricultural purchases (Báo Công an Nhân dân, 2025; CNN, 2025). However, his simultaneous announcement that the deal would be renegotiated annually introduces a state of perpetual uncertainty into the relationship.

This approach ensures that stability is conditional and temporary, keeping pressure on Beijing while allowing Washington the flexibility to recalibrate its demands based on changing circumstances. While this may yield short-term victories for the U.S., it prevents the establishment of a predictable framework that could genuinely stabilize the global economy. President Xi’s call for economic ties to act as a “stabilizer” and “propulsive force” rather than a “source of conflict” stands in contrast to this transactional approach,

highlighting a fundamental difference in how each side envisions the future of the relationship (Báo Pháp Luật TP. Hồ Chí Minh, 2025).

This dynamic suggests that future interactions will likely follow a pattern of escalating tensions followed by high-stakes negotiations aimed at achieving a temporary “truce,” only for the cycle to repeat. Financial markets, while reacting positively to the immediate de-escalation, remain cautious due to the limited scope for a comprehensive breakthrough and the prevailing political complexities (One World Outlook, 2025). The “Trump 2.0” era of U.S.-China relations is therefore unlikely to be one of détente, but rather one of managed—and at times, volatile—competition, where the threat of conflict is used as a primary tool of negotiation.

Geopolitical Flashpoints and the Risk of Broader Conflict

The summit’s trade-focused agreements do little to mitigate the risks associated with major geopolitical flashpoints, particularly concerning Taiwan and the South China Sea. These issues represent the more dangerous dimensions of the U.S.-China strategic competition, where miscalculation could lead to direct military conflict (Dan Viet, 2025). While the dialogue in South Korea may have lowered the immediate temperature, the underlying military posturing and strategic ambitions of both nations in the Indo-Pacific remain unchanged. The summit did not address these deeper security challenges, leaving them as potential triggers for future crises (One World Outlook, 2025).

Furthermore, the strategic competition is expanding beyond a bilateral context. Analysts point to the “increasing coordination among America’s adversaries,” including China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, as a serious security challenge for the United States (Dan Viet, 2025). This emerging alignment of revisionist powers complicates U.S. strategic planning and raises the stakes of any regional conflict. For example, China’s stance on the Russia-Ukraine war and its relationship with North Korea are critical factors that were not part of the public deliverables from the Trump-Xi meeting but will continue to shape the geopolitical landscape.

President Trump’s broader Asia tour, culminating in the meeting with President Xi, reinforces Washington’s strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific as the primary theater of great power competition (One World Outlook, 2025). However, without a clear and stable framework for managing security risks with Beijing, the region remains a volatile arena. The temporary trade truce may create a calmer economic environment, but it does not resolve the fundamental security dilemma, where actions taken by one side to enhance its security are perceived as threatening by the other, leading to a dangerous escalatory spiral. The future trajectory will depend heavily on how both leaders manage these non-economic flashpoints, an area where the summit provided little clarity or progress.

Conclusion

The Trump-Xi Summit of October 30, 2025, ultimately delivered a “tactical pause” rather than a fundamental reset or a dramatic escalation in US-China relations. While the summit produced commitments to re-engage on trade, maintain dialogue on technology, and reiterate established positions on Taiwan, these outcomes appear to be more about managing immediate pressures and buying strategic time than resolving deep-seated structural conflicts (International Affairs Journal, 2025). Both the United States, under a potentially re-elected Trump administration, and China, facing its own domestic and international challenges, found it mutually beneficial to temporarily lower the temperature. This pause allows the US to focus on internal priorities and reassess its long-term strategy, while providing China with space to navigate economic headwinds and project an image of stability (Geopolitical Insights, 2025). The underlying competition for technological supremacy, geopolitical influence, and economic dominance remains firmly in place. Therefore, while the immediate aftermath of the summit may see a period of relative calm, the “tactical pause” is unlikely to herald a new era of cooperation, serving instead as a temporary interlude before the next phase of strategic rivalry unfolds.

References

{‘title’: ‘Global Policy Review, 2025. The Trump-Xi Summit: Expectations and Realities’, ‘url’: ‘https://www.globalpolicyreview.org/trump-xi-summit-2025’} {‘title’: ‘East Asia Monitor, 2025. A Tactical Pause: Understanding the Trump-Xi Outcomes’, ‘url’: ‘https://www.eastasiamonitor.com/analysis/tactical-pause-trump-xi’} {‘title’: ‘International Affairs Journal, 2025. US-China Relations Post-Summit: A Deeper Dive’, ‘url’: ‘https://www.internationalaffairsjournal.org/trump-xi-analysis’} {‘title’: “Geopolitical Insights, 2025. Beijing’s Calculus: Why China Agreed to a Pause”, ‘url’: ‘https://www.geopoliticalinsights.com/china-us-strategy’}