



ASIA-PACIFIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK

THE 2025 BUSAN MEETING: SETTING NEW EXPECTATIONS FOR CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES

Wu Chunsi, Director of the Institute of International Strategic and Security Studies, Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (SIIS).

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On October 30, Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump [met](#) in Busan, South Korea, on the sideline of the APEC Summit. While the meeting did not actually last for four hours, as President Trump was overheard suggesting, the meeting took place under the global spotlight and raised new expectations for improved China-United States ties, injecting stability into the turbulent relationship between the two countries.

Stable China-US Relations Expected

The deterioration of China-US relations was solidified during the first Donald Trump Administration, when the [US National Security Strategy published in 2017 defined China as a "strategic competitor."](#) This understanding of the US policy toward China, however, can be traced further back to the Obama Administration's 'Asia-Pacific Rebalancing' strategy.

The concept of a "strategic competitor" which has been used by the United States in its government reports is, however, highly misleading. It is understood in the same way as the strategic competition during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The concept assumes "strategic competition" is a normal competition, and many Americans believe that the Chinese do not like the concept because China either misunderstands "competition" or fears it. By labeling China as a "strategic competitor," the United States essentially defines the China-US relationship through a "zero-sum" equation. That is, if China gains, the United States loses and vice-versa. China has, however, consistently opposed this concept of strategic competition, advocating instead for a new type of major-power relationship between China and the United States, characterised by "no confrontation, no conflict, mutual respect, and mutual benefit."

At the recent Busan meeting, President Xi further proposed that [China and the United States should become friends and partners](#), paving the way for building better bilateral relations. It is hoped that the United States will work towards the same goal and reposition its China policy on a positive and constructive track. A stable and healthy

China-US relationship will not only benefit the two countries but also contribute to peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

Sustained Engagement Required

At the Busan meeting, President Xi and President Trump also formally endorsed the [framework agreement reached by both sides in Kuala Lumpur](#) on tariffs and export controls. The agreement bolstered global market confidence and drew significant media attention. There have been three significant outcomes of the 2025 Busan meeting.

First, President Xi and President Trump agreed to maintain high-level communication and consultations in the future – an outcome which has received little emphasis in the coverage of the Busan summit. President Trump will [visit China in April 2026](#) and reciprocally has invited President Xi to visit the United States. Through such interactions, the two leaders can steer the course of bilateral relations toward greater stability.

Second, the [China-US Economic and Trade Consultation Mechanism](#) will continue. A sustainable economic dialogue between the two countries will provide new momentum to the overall bilateral relationship. The economic and trade consultation mechanism so far mainly focused on preventing the economic frictions between China and the United States from spiraling out of control and on sending positive signals to global markets. Going forward, if the two sides can find more such common grounds through the implementation of the two leaders' consensus, China and the United States might be able to rebuild the complementary foundation of their economic relations and positively push forward the development of their bilateral relationship.

Third, China-US are now engaging in various domains, beyond the economy and trade. In September 2025, the US and Chinese defense ministers had their [first video conference](#) since the second Trump administration came to power in the United States. On October 31, the two defense ministers held an [in-person meeting](#) on the sideline of the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) in Kuala Lumpur. Chinese and US officials are also expected to engage more on security and other issues in the future, in order to implement the consensus arrived between the two Presidents in Busan.

Timely communication between relevant officials of the two countries remains significant for maintaining and advancing a stable relationship. While occasional disagreements and even friction are almost inevitable, it is important to build reliable channels and mechanisms to handle the disputes and maintain the pace of bilateral engagement.

Positive Support Needed

China and the United States have global influence. The deterioration of their relations will negatively impact the entire world. Therefore, it is in the interest of all countries to

support a stable China-United States relationship, which can cooperate to make greater contributions to safeguarding world peace, development and prosperity. Through reduced geopolitical tensions and enhance coordination, China and the United States can put more energies and resources toward alleviating numerous global challenges, such as persistent poverty, the spread of epidemics, extreme weather events, natural disasters, and terrorism.

A single meeting, however, cannot resolve all the issues in the present China-United States bilateral relations. Given the setting of the APEC Summit, the recent meeting between President Xi and President Trump focused more on economic and trade matters. In the future, China and the United States have the opportunity to explore ways to manage differences, alleviate mutual suspicion and lead bilateral relations back to a healthier and more stable status.

*Dr Wu Chunsi is the Director of the Center for American Studies, and senior fellow of the Institute for International Strategic and Security Studies, her research interests include Chinese-U.S. security relations, arms control, nuclear deterrence, and Northeast Asia security. She authors *Deterrence Theories and Missile Defense* (2001, in Chinese) and co-authors *Deterrence and Stability: China-U.S. Nuclear Relationship* (2005, in Chinese). Dr. Wu Chunsi received a doctoral degree in international relations by Fudan University in July of 2002. As assistant researcher and associate professor, she worked at Center for American Studies, Fudan University, from August 1997 to October 2006. In 2004-2005, she studied Chinese-U.S. space relationship at Center for International Affairs, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

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