

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Xi's Visit to the US: Managing Constructive Strategic Stability

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S*ummary*

President Xi Jinping's upcoming visit to the US is another high-level attempt to stabilise bilateral ties that remain highly volatile.

President Xi Jinping is set to visit the US in late September 2026. President Xi and President Donald Trump met in Beijing earlier in May 2026. Reportedly, the Chinese President will be accompanied by a large business delegation, signalling China’s interest in expanding economic ties.¹ The two countries are engaged in back-channel negotiations on the visit’s potential agenda and outcomes. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told the US Ambassador to China, David Perdue, during a meeting in late August, that both sides should “focus on the positive agenda, properly manage differences, remove interference and overcome obstacles to high-level exchanges between the two countries”.²

While the specifics of what will be discussed remain unknown, sources in Washington have claimed that China and the US could discuss AI-safety risks during the September summit.³ The US is concerned about AI-directed cyberattacks from China and wants to establish a regulatory framework in which US and Chinese AI labs police themselves.⁴ Similarly, Beijing is keen to ease the tech war and negotiate some relaxation on Chinese access to high-end chips and equipment.⁵ The Chinese side has not yet confirmed the agenda. Similar to the government’s posture when Trump visited Beijing in May, China is again reserved and cautious in its press briefings about the upcoming summit.

Although there were no unexpected breakthroughs during the last round of head-of-state talks, the two sides had agreed to establish constructive strategic stability to manage bilateral ties. Proposed by Beijing and endorsed by Washington, constructive strategic stability is expected to be the new diplomatic framework that guides China–US détente for the next three years. However, the question remains whether the two sides share the same understanding of what constitutes constructive strategic stability and what could upend the arrangement.

For now, the convergence on these issues appears thin. Both sides acknowledge that any escalation without guardrails will inflict high costs on each other.⁶ The all-out tariff war in the early months of 2025 disrupted consumer prices, supply-chains and economic activity, demonstrating the real damage unmanaged rivalry can cause. In

¹ Laurie Chen and Eduardo Baptista, [**“China’s Xi Seeks to Bring Large CEO Delegation on US Visit, Sources Say”**](#), *Reuters*, 4 September 2026.

² Huizhong Wu, [**“Chinese Foreign Minister Calls for US and China to ‘Overcome Obstacles’ Ahead of Presidential Summit”**](#), *Associated Press*, 27 August 2026.

³ Laurie Chen, [**“US, China Gear up for Mid-September AI Safety Talks”**](#), *Reuters*, 4 September 2026.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Stella Yifan Xie and Yifan Yu, [**“US and China Eye Trump-Xi Talks on AI Guardrails Despite Tech Rift”**](#), *Nikkei Asia*, 7 September 2026.

⁶ [**“China’s President Xi Appears to have Laid Out a New Strategic Framework for the Bilateral Relationship”**](#), Comment, Facebook, 16 May 2026.

that context, the US–China joint statement emphasising cooperation and the subsequent agreement to pause the tariff war after the Geneva talks in 2025 reflected both sides' affirmation of the need to regulate the relationship's disruptive dynamics. Therefore, the Xi–Trump meeting in May also marked a continuation of bilateral efforts to stabilise the relationship at the highest level.

Filled with photo-op moments, the May 2026 summit, however, produced no substantive convergence between the two countries on what constructive strategic stability would require to function properly or what factors could upend the arrangement. The Chinese readout, issued after the meeting, said that constructive strategic stability consisted of ‘Four Stabilities’: positive stability with cooperation as the mainstay; healthy stability with competition within proper limits; constant stability with manageable differences; and lasting stability with expectable peace.⁷

From the Chinese perspective, this translates into first, respecting China’s four red lines—the Taiwan question, democracy and human rights, China’s path and development and China’s development rights.⁸ Second, establishing predictable trade relations by loosening export controls and sanctions, increasing investment and recognising China as an important trading partner.⁹ Third, China is also seeking détente on technological competition, whereby the US withdraws sanctions and restrictions on high-end chips and tech equipment, acceding to ‘China’s right to technological development’.¹⁰

The point is that the US has not explicitly acknowledged any of these conditions, which seem to be the basis of China's understanding of constructive strategic stability. Instead, the fact sheet that was released from the White House stated, in a slightly rephrased manner, that the two leaders had agreed to establish a ‘constructive relationship of strategic stability based on fairness and reciprocity’.¹¹

Reading Trump’s understanding of strategic stability based on fairness and reciprocity could mean that US commitments arrived at the summit are reversible and are contingent on larger Chinese purchases of American agricultural and

⁷ Chen Qiaoshen, “[‘Constructive Strategic Stability’: China, US Eye New Vision for Ties](#)”, *CGTN*, 14 May 2026.

⁸ “[Xi Meets Biden in Lima](#)”, *Xinhua*, The State Council Information Office, The People’s Republic of China, 17 November 2024.

⁹ “[White Paper on China's Position on China-US Economic and Trade Relations](#)”, Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, 9 April 2025.

¹⁰ “[From Head-of-State Meetings to Technological Competition and Cooperation: China-US Technological Competition, Complementarity, and Future Directions](#)”, *Sohu.com*, 18 May 2026.

¹¹ “[Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Secures Historic Deals with China, Delivering for American Workers, Farmers, and Industry](#)”, The White House, 17 May 2026.

industrial products and possibly US oil, relaxation in critical minerals supply to the US and Chinese investments in ‘non-strategic and non-sensitive areas’, cooperation on curbing the flow of fentanyl, a step-up in Chinese cooperation on the US–Israel–Iran conflict, the Ukraine war and possibly in constraining North Korea’s nuclear weapons programme.¹² Notably, these references were absent from the Chinese Foreign Ministry statement.

Given domestic exigencies, the inconsistencies in Chinese and US announcements are understandable, as neither side would want to appear bullied. Therefore, each side highlighted the aspects that would give it the most domestic political capital.¹³ The full extent of the agreements will become clearer as bilateral ties progress. However, it still does not clarify how far the two powers are prepared to accommodate each other’s core concerns. By contrast, structural pressures and deep mistrust make it more likely that the new diplomatic framework is a stopgap strategy for both sides to manage short-term friction without mitigating the rivalry.¹⁴

Following the May summit, the ground report on many of the issues that were discussed is not very optimistic. For instance, beyond soybean imports, China has made little progress on its commitment to buy 200 Boeing planes and to increase imports of US beef and poultry products.¹⁵ Further, Chinese exports of rare-earth minerals to the US have also remained low, as some Chinese firms halted shipments to the US out of fear of repercussions from Beijing.¹⁶

Similarly, the trade and tech war has hardly eased. The US increased tariffs on Chinese imports and added 43 Chinese firms to the Uyghur Forced Labor Entity List created under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, introduced in June 2022. In June 2026, Washington also added top Chinese tech firms BYD, Alibaba, and Baidu to its military blacklist under Section 1260H of the National Defense Authorization Act. This imposes significant restrictions on their business activities in the US market. The US government is also planning to impose additional overcapacity tariffs on Chinese imports.¹⁷

¹² Barbara Weisel, [**“Post U.S.-China Summit: Managed Instability”**](#), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 27 May 2026.

¹³ Jennifer Pak, [**“The Aftermath of Trump-Xi Summit: Comparing U.S. and China Announcements”**](#), NPR, 22 May 2026.

¹⁴ Zongyuan Zoe Liu, [**“China and the U.S. Agreed to ‘Strategic Stability’ in Beijing. They Don’t Define It the Same Way”**](#), Council on Foreign Relations, 18 May 2026.

¹⁵ [**“Congress Members Press USTR on China Chicken Trade Barriers”**](#), WattPoultry, 9 September 2026.

¹⁶ [**“China August Rare Earths Exports Stay Below Year-to-Date Monthly Average”**](#), Mining.com, 8 September 2026.

¹⁷ [**“US-China Relations in the Trump 2.0 Era: A Timeline”**](#), China Briefing, 24 August 2026.

Notably, in recent months, Beijing has also retaliated by adding 10 US robotics, rare-earth and defence-related companies to its Export Control List and blocking another 46 defence companies from government procurement. Additionally, China has barred the export of drones and drone components to the US, banned US certification agencies from conducting factory-tracking inspections for the China Compulsory Certification (CCC) system, and added US firm Compliance Testing LLC to the countermeasures list, increasing the costs of US exports to China.¹⁸

Clearly, there remains a deep chasm between the rhetoric of ‘constructive partnership of strategic stability’ and the developments underway. Therefore, Xi’s upcoming visit to the US, rather than a demonstration of constructive partnership, is another high-level attempt to stabilise ties that remain highly volatile. Observers contend that China–US leader-level summits have become a strategy to contain crises rather than a ‘reward for good relations’.¹⁹

This shift indicates how deeply the nature of Sino-US rivalry has changed with the trade and tech war. What is unfolding is not a race towards technological and economic pre-eminence; instead, both sides are reducing vulnerabilities *vis-à-vis* the other and signalling resolve through calibrated punitive measures to deter the other from exploiting any perceived weakness. In this scenario, no domain remains insulated from weaponisation. This leader-level summit should be seen as an exercise in preventing further issues from being subsumed into the broader strategic rivalry.

This trade and tech war has created significant strategic pressures for New Delhi, leading to major economic and supply-chain risks. US controls on access to cutting-edge tech and Chinese restrictions on rare-earth critical minerals have also subsequently affected Indian industries. Therefore, close attention to the summit’s outcome will be essential, as the two powers will meet closely after the 2026 BRICS Summit. Their policy positions about trade, tech and larger geopolitics will impact many of the agendas, like supply-chain resilience, access to rare-earth and critical minerals, energy security, cybersecurity and tariff barriers, that will be of major importance to India and other like-minded countries.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Simone McCarthy, [**“As US and China Throw Up Tit-for-Tat Sanctions, is Trump’s Xi Meeting at Risk?”**](#), CNN, 7 August 2026.

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