

Will Trump-Xi meeting in April increase India's diplomatic isolation?

A larger lesson for India is to expand its leverages and not be apprehensive about interdependence.

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US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Gimhae Air Base in Busan, South Korea, in October 2025. | AFP

Amid global tensions involving [Venezuela](#) and [Iran](#), there is hope that the scheduled meeting between US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing in [April 2026](#) could arrest America's aggressive and predatory policies.

A possible Trump-Xi détente could also reduce risk-taking in the Taiwan Straits, and push China to take a different position on the Ukraine war.

In 2025, Trump [accepted an invitation](#) from Xi to visit Beijing in April 2026. The call, as US media reported, was [initiated](#) by Xi.

This was preceded by a Trump-Xi meeting at Busan, South Korea, on October 30, which the US President said was “[highly successful](#)”. The meeting took place in the backdrop of retaliatory tariff measures by both sides, and appeared to have eased tensions, which was also partly over China and Japan's [war of words](#) over Taiwan.

While the Busan meeting and the [subsequent engagements](#) between the two world leaders are being seen as a temporary truce at least on the economic front, they do little to change the structural issues and assuage the US about the consequences of China's rise. New pressure could also build up following Beijing's warning that it could impose retaliatory tariffs on the US in the event Washington imposes a [25% tariff](#) on countries trading with Iran. Like many others, China also imports cheap Iranian oil.

Importantly, however, the Trump-Xi meeting appears to have implications for India. While Trump's tariff shock, the delay in finalising a US-India trade agreement and a certain diplomatic chill have worked to rock the once promising "strategic partnership", they have pushed New Delhi to try to normalise ties with Beijing.

A Communist Party of China delegation, which arrived in New Delhi on January 11, the [first](#) since the 2020 Galwan Valley clashes, [met BJP](#) and [RSS](#) leaders on January 12 and 13, respectively. Indian National Security Adviser Ajot Doval is [expected](#) to visit China soon, although no specific dates have been announced, and this will keep the diplomatic track moving with efforts to improve relations over the vexed border issue.

Impact of Sino-US overtures

At the global level, US-China relations are bound to be consequential, with implications on trade in commodities and metals and on supply chains.

Bilaterally, [trade](#) in fentanyl components, technology, agricultural trade and rare earths exports control was a core issue for the US. In particular, disagreements over how to handle the fentanyl issue delayed the US-China trade agreement, which could have been [possible as early as March this year](#). This did not materialise.

Also, even as Chinese and US officials negotiated the trade and economic deal in the backrooms, publicly Beijing continued to pursue a combative approach and [put restrictions](#) on soybean imports from the US, with diversification leading to increased imports from Brazil and other countries in Latin America. The fact that the US and China are truly interdependent has helped them battle hard not only in trade terms but also respond swiftly when backroom options were available.

It is undeniable that China has had more leverage in its bargain with the US as compared to any other country. China's manufacturing and export

competitiveness and near monopoly in sectors such as rare earths elements was central to its strategy.

Equally important was China's role as a consumer of American industrial and agricultural products, which is not accounted for adequately by western analysts.

After the Busan meeting, the US reduced its tariffs on China from 57% to 47%, besides cutting [fentanyl related tariffs from 20% to 10%](#). The chip-related restrictions remain in place. China [relaxed](#) its exports controls related to rare earths and suspended investigations of US microchip companies. It also [suspended additional tariffs](#) on US imports, which will help soybean exports to China.

Consequences for India

The Trump-Xi meeting has consequences and lessons for India. One of the ways it can help India is by boosting its commodities sector exports to China significantly after the Washington-Beijing trade war dampened Chinese demand over the last 11 months or so.

However, this does little to assuage India's general concerns with reference to its trade imbalance.

Trump's use of the term "[return to G2](#)" on the eve of his November 2025 talks with Xi, while referring to the US and China and as two great powers, would certainly have ruffled a few feathers in New Delhi as this has an old history. The expression [emerged in 2005](#) in a book by American economist Fred Bergsten in reference to transatlantic relations and later in the backdrop of the return of the bipolar world order with the rise of China which, by 2009, was about to surpass Japan and had a significantly stronger economic momentum compared to India.

Many see G2's return as a sign of India's deepening diplomatic isolation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi [skipped the UN General Assembly](#) in September 2025 and the [ASEAN summit in Malaysia](#) in October the same year. He also [stayed away](#) from attending the COP-30 summit in Brazil.

At the same time, US-India relations took a hit as a consequence of the bonhomie between Trump and the Pakistani leadership. Trump's claims of playing a decisive [role in halting](#) India-Pakistan clashes in May 2025, his revelations of India's military losses during Operation Sindoor and New

Delhi's unwillingness to accept Trump's mediation and the G2 reference do not sit well with the Indian leadership. This narrows India's choices.

The return of G2 and the apparent normalisation of US-China relations could stall any progress in India-China ties.

Some scholars [have noted](#) that India-China relations progress when China's relations with the US are strained. This was seen in the early 1990s after China faced sanctions following the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Conversely, a softening of US-China relations would make it harder for India to get a better trade bargain from China, than if the tensions persisted.

Bilaterally, China also seems determined to compel India to accept its centrality in Asia and a return to such posturing cannot be ruled out, despite [recent progress in relations](#).

The return of bipolarity, which appears to be more like duopoly, would demand a more active Indian foreign policy and diplomacy. India, therefore, faces both geopolitical and goeconomic uncertainties under Trump who is intent on being the lone architect of the order and thus challenges several of India's assumptions on what course to follow.

India needs a nimble multilateral strategy and bilateral economic diplomacy abroad and a fresh look at its domestic industrial and innovation strategy.

Over the last two decades, particularly since the India-US nuclear deal, India's core concerns with regard to trade, investments and technology, and regional security have worked out fairly well due to the US-China rivalry and India's partnership with the liberal order.

However, in the new era, the older playbook may have run its course as Trump demands more from India. A larger lesson for India is to expand its leverages and not be apprehensive about interdependence.

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