



# The Time Game: A Critical Analysis of the Summit Between Xi Jinping and Donald Trump

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The summit meeting between Chinese President **Xi Jinping** and U.S. President **Donald Trump** in Washington represents a **pivotal moment in contemporary geopolitics**. This meeting is not merely an event of high-level diplomatic pageantry, but a reflection of a **profound shift in the global balance of power**. In the current context, the power dynamics between the two superpowers appear to have been redefined since their first meetings nearly a decade ago at Mar-a-Lago. The analysis of the event reveals a complex intersection of domestic political factors, economic strategies, and diplomatic pressures, in which **timing plays a decisive role**.

## 1. Diverging Political Timelines and Beijing's Strategic Advantage

The confrontation between the two leaders unfolds across **markedly asymmetric time horizons**. Donald Trump operates within a framework shaped by the imminence of **midterm**

**elections** in the United States and by the challenges posed by complex and costly conflicts, such as the crisis in the Gulf. This combination of electoral pressures, **inflation and high oil prices** limits the flexibility of the U.S. administration and reduces its tolerance for new economic shocks.

By contrast, Xi Jinping benefits from a political system that provides him with **extended leadership continuity**, as he prepares to seek a **fourth term** at the helm of the Chinese Communist Party. The absence of a direct electoral deadline gives Beijing the ability to pursue a **long-term vision**. This advantage allows the Chinese president to **manage the trade truce at his own pace**, turning time into a key negotiating lever.

## 2. From Concessions to a Strategic Response: The Transformation of Economic Relations

Over the years, Beijing's approach toward Washington has undergone a **substantial evolution** :

- **The early years of the Trump presidency:** China tended to maintain a moderate and accommodating posture, committing in 2018 to purchase **\$200 billion** in U.S. goods and services to rebalance the trade balance.
- **The tariff deadlock:** Faced with U.S. tariff pressure, Beijing gradually changed its approach, responding with **targeted countermeasures**.
- **The critical minerals lever:** China used its position of strength by imposing **export restrictions on rare earths**, which are essential to the U.S. technology and defense industries.

This move exposed the **structural vulnerabilities of the U.S. economy**, forcing the U.S. administration to seek a pause or a negotiated truce. Despite tariff barriers, China's trade balance recorded a **record surplus of \$1.2 trillion** over the past year, confirming Beijing's central role in global manufacturing.

## 3. “Constructive Strategic Stability” and the Pragmatics of “Summitry”

The concept of “**constructive strategic stability**”, promoted by Chinese diplomacy, provides the conceptual framework for the new approach toward the United States. This formula seeks to establish **clear boundaries** within which bilateral competition can develop without escalating into open conflict.

For Beijing, **diplomacy at the highest level (“summitry”)** serves a dual function:

1. **Geopolitical containment:** Direct engagement between heads of state reduces the risk of sudden unilateral decisions by Washington, such as **new technology sanctions or further military assistance to Taiwan**.
2. **Domestic and international legitimacy:** Official visits and state receptions project an image of Xi Jinping as a **statesman of global stature**, a central element for China’s leadership at a time of slowing domestic economic growth and reforms within the military establishment.

International analysts nevertheless point out that this truce rests on **essentially tactical foundations**. Without a permanent and well-developed diplomatic infrastructure, the stability negotiated directly between the two leaders risks **remaining precarious**.



## 4. Critical Dossiers: Taiwan and Artificial Intelligence

The summit agenda includes issues with **high potential for friction**, on which both sides are seeking to balance their respective positions of strength:

## The Taiwan Dossier

Taiwan remains the **most sensitive political and security issue**. The temporary **suspension of \$14 billion in arms sales** to the island is seen by Beijing as an important signal, while in Washington the handling of the issue is sparking debate over compliance with the long-term strategic commitments established by U.S. law.

## Artificial Intelligence and Technology Governance

On Artificial Intelligence governance, a **clear divergence in priorities** is emerging:

- **United States:** The focus is on **controlling systemic risks**, the security of advanced algorithms, and the protection of intellectual property, while maintaining the **technological advantage in semiconductors**.
- **China:** Beijing prefers to **depoliticize AI development** to prevent international regulations from becoming tools of technological containment, while maintaining strict domestic control over information and cybersecurity.

## 5. Internal Challenges and Power Balances

Despite its diplomatic successes and resilient foreign trade, China faces **significant internal structural challenges**:

- The **real estate sector crisis**.
- The **high youth unemployment rate**.
- The **industrial overcapacity** and the reshuffling of the armed forces' top leadership.

On the other hand, the United States retains a strong position in the financial sector, advanced research, and the **development of next-generation microchips**. This combination of mutual strengths and vulnerabilities creates a situation of "**precarious stalemate**". **Neither power considers it advisable to take the confrontation to the extreme**: China seeks stability to manage its domestic economic transition, while the United States aims to limit inflationary pressures and international frictions.

## Conclusions: Toward a New Phase of Global Competition

The meeting between Xi Jinping and Donald Trump shows how the confrontation between the United States and China is shifting from an open clash to **the controlled management of rivalry**. With future international engagements approaching, including the APEC and G20 summits, the primary goal of the two capitals remains the **maintenance of a tactical balance**.

China has demonstrated that it can withstand unilateral pressure and has managed to **assert a vision of equality** in bilateral relations. However, the pursuit of "strategic stability" **does not amount to deep reconciliation**, but rather to a **calculated pause** within a systemic competition destined to continue over time.

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