



By: TA | AP Insight

Will the Iran war overshadow the hype of the Trump-Xi summit?



Weeks before his trip to China, President Donald Trump was already predicting on social media that his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, would “give me a big, fat hug when I get there.”

But Beijing’s deep economic ties to Iran, as well as trade tensions over tariff threats stretching back to Trump’s first term, could crimp the good feelings when **Trump flies to Beijing this week** – even though the Republican president has for years effusively praised Xi, making it clear he sees China’s leader as a competitor strong enough to warrant his respect and admiration.

Trump isn't fond of long plane rides or extended stretches away from the White House or his properties in Florida and New Jersey. He is expected to only spend parts of three days on the ground in China.

There will be plenty of pomp, but the grandeur is not expected to rival Trump's first visit to China in 2017, which Beijing dubbed a “state visit-plus.”

“Even before this whole conflagration with Iran, they weren’t going to go state visit-plus like last time, just because things are tense,” said Jonathan Czin, a former director for China at the National Security Council during the Biden administration.

Xi's ‘better understanding’ of Trump

On Trump's first-term trip, China rolled out the red carpet for his arrival, with a band playing military music and children waving flags and chanting “Welcome.”

Xi offered a tour of the Forbidden City. Trump and first lady Melania Trump even had a private dinner there.

Trump was the first foreign leader since the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949 to experience what was once reserved for emperors.

The following morning brought another **welcome ceremony** at the Great Hall of the People and featured a military parade.

There also was a state banquet in Trump’s honor with video highlights from the Chinese leader’s previous visit to Florida and a clip of Trump’s granddaughter Arabella singing in Chinese.

Beijing does not offer this level of spectacle to most visiting foreign leaders. When British Prime Minister Keir Starmer visited the Forbidden City in January, Xi did not attend and the site remained open to the public. Starmer had to contend with tourists.

Ali Wyne, senior U.S.-China research and advocacy adviser for the Washington nonprofit the Crisis Group, said the “Chinese delegation will likely do its utmost to ensure that Trump leaves Beijing believing that he has just concluded the most extraordinary state visit of his two presidencies.”

But, he said, the “pomp and circumstance would serve a different role now than they did when he first visited Beijing” because “Xi has a much better understanding of Trump, and the administration’s own national security strategy and national defense strategy recognize China as a near-peer.”

The Chinese may not offer major breakthroughs on trade or anything else - Jonathan Czin

Expectations for what gets accomplished could be lower this time, said Czin, now a fellow at the Brookings Institution.

He predicted that the Chinese may not offer major breakthroughs on trade or anything else because they are “working backward from our midterm elections” with the theory that the closer they get to Election Day “the more leverage they are going to have.”

The GOP is focused on retaining control of Congress, even as **polling shows** most Americans are unhappy with Trump’s

economic policies and believe that the United States went too far in Iran.

Still, the White House argues that Trump's previous firm hand with Beijing on tariffs — which the **Supreme Court** subsequently struck down— means the U.S. will remain in a strong position.

“President Trump cares about results, not symbols,” White House spokesperson Anna Kelly said. “But even still, the president has a great relationship with President Xi, and the upcoming summit in Beijing will be both symbolically and substantively significant.”

Trump and Xi may see a lot of each other this year

Trump could meet with China's leader four times in eight months.

After his visit to Beijing, Trump plans to host Xi at the White House.

Trump might also attend the November Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Shenzhen, China. And Xi could come to the Group of 20 summit the following month at Trump's resort in Doral, Florida.

Xi may attempt to pocket as many economic and security concessions from Trump as possible - Ali Wyne

Czin noted that Xi also is not very fond of travel, meaning not all of the planned encounters may happen. He said China's leader also does not “do personal connections” like the kind Trump relishes, noting Xi led a **Chinese military purge** in January that included replacing officials with long-standing personal ties to his family.

Wyne, though, said Xi also “appreciates that he is unlikely to deal with another U.S. president who admires him as greatly and embraces as narrow a view of strategic competition.”

That means Xi may “attempt to pocket as many economic and security concessions from Trump as possible,” Wyne said.

Trump has long praised Xi

Trump told The Wall Street Journal's editorial board in 2024 that Xi “was actually a really good ... I don't want to say ‘friend.’ I don't want to act foolish. ‘He was my friend.’ But I got along with him great.”

Trump even suggested at the time that military force might not be required to ensure that Chinese troops do not encroach on Taiwan, simply because China's leader “respects me,” despite Trump more recently discussing potentially **selling arms to Taiwan**.

Trump has continued to praise the bilateral relationship since returning to the White House, even after his Beijing visit, originally scheduled for March, was postponed due to the early stages of the Iran war.

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He unsuccessfully prodded China to get involved in reopening the Strait of Hormuz after Iranian forces choked it off and disrupted global economies.

But China did use its leverage as the **largest purchaser** of Iranian oil to encourage Iran to agree to what has been a fragile ceasefire.

Beijing has strong economic ties to Tehran, and the war could hurt its economy, which was already projected to **grow more slowly**.

If China can help establish lasting peace, though, that might boost its standing in negotiations on trade issues with the Trump administration.

Trade issues a sticking point

China,” she said.

During his 2017 visit, Trump announced \$250 billion in nonbinding trade deals, some of which never materialized. A round of trade deals announced in 2020 and worth \$200 billion mostly never came to fruition before Trump's first term ended.

More recently, Trump's announcement last year of steep global tariffs prompted China to cut off purchases of U.S. soybeans and clamp down on exports of rare earth minerals needed by American factories.



I expect great stability in the relationship. But that doesn't mean our trade deficit can't continue dropping - Scott Bessent

Tensions have eased somewhat since the U.S. reached a **trade truce** last fall that has limited tariffs on both sides.

The administration has continued to make reducing the U.S. trade deficit with China a priority, insisting it can do so while still working to encourage trade between the two countries.

"I expect great stability in the relationship," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said. "But that doesn't mean our trade deficit can't continue dropping."

Kelly, the White House spokeswoman, said Trump "doesn't travel anywhere without bringing deliverables home to our country."

"Americans can expect the president to deliver more good deals for the United States while in