



RCAS Commentary

China-US Summit Opens Better Communication Channels

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About RCAS

香港亞洲研究中心| The Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS) is a nonprofit research organization focusing on Asian affairs. It is a newly established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng in Haikou and subsequently moved to Hong Kong in September 2023. We currently have an international research team with nearly 100 resident/nonresident researchers from China and other countries.

RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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The entire world is witnessing a turbulent and unpredictable period in international relations. The unpredictable events, such as the Russia-Ukraine military conflict and the US-Israel-Iran war, have ramifications for freedom of navigation in the world's oceans and transport of oil, gas and food supplies.



▲ Xi attends welcome ceremony held by Trump-China Tibetannnet.

The current wars have also shown that military power alone will not be able to resolve many issues, highlighting the need to engage in diplomatic dialogue to address common issues for the greater good of people in many different parts of the world.

The summit meeting between President Xi Jinping and President Donald Trump held in Washington is critically important and could be seen as important efforts toward building a stabilization mechanism between China and the US.

President Xi received a grand welcome in the US and President Trump was personally there to welcome him. This is an indicator of the value of the Chinese president visiting the US.

The summit is significant because both leaders appear to recognize that unmanaged China-US rivalry carries substantial economic and security risks. They have emphasized dialogue, strategic stability and avoiding a conflict between the two major powers.

During his visit, Xi pointed out that "the Thucydides Trap can be overcome" and "achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and making America great again can go hand in hand."

It will be a relief to the entire world that the US does not consider China as a rival but a peer competitor.

Competition between major powers will be there and cannot be completely eliminated. However, the best thing for the sake of the world is that it is managed in such a way that it will not lead to military engagement. Regular leader-level dialogue reduces the danger of miscalculation.

We cannot and should not expect that everything will be good between China and the US after the summit. We should be happy the world's two most powerful leaders are meeting again. Hence, the world can probably expect only a partial and conditional reset of relations. This summit will not resolve the rivalry, but it will stabilize relations, at least up to a certain level where military conflict is not immediate. The summit could open better communication channels between China and the US and minimize tension at a tactical level. Both countries have incentives to preserve economic exchanges and prevent another escalation of tariff confrontation. Cooperation brings mutual benefit.

The world's two major countries must exist in peace and find a way to get along.

Economic interdependence still provides an important stabilizing incentive. Neither side appears to be pursuing complete economic separation. Trade, supply chains, agricultural purchases, critical minerals and technology remain the areas where both Washington and Beijing have something to negotiate.

The real question is whether both leaders can translate the bonhomie they showed to the world into institutionalized mechanisms, follow-through and sustained communication.

This summit may help to establish a more predictable framework in which competition continues while both sides attempt to prevent it from becoming military conflict. It could be labelled as "managed strategic competition."

Beijing and Washington need to institutionalize the dialogue to manage the competition with guardrails and manage the Taiwan question, prevent escalation in technology and

trade, develop and manage AI for good, and maintain channels of communication during crises.

There could be good news for American youth as Xi invited 100,000 youth to visit China for exchanges and study over the next 5 years, and two giant pandas arrived at their new home at Zoo Atlanta, embarking on a 10-year protection cooperation program in the US. These are symbolic gestures but both leaders need to work to enhance mutual bonds beyond words and gestures.

World peace depends on these great countries. They have to work to enhance the welfare of people. They have to realize a potential war will bring only destruction and harm to people all over the world. The world needs peace and stability.

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About Author



Admiral (Prof.) Jayanath Colombage is an Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS), Hong Kong. He has served the Sri Lanka Navy for a period of 36 years and retired as the Commander of the Navy on 01 July 2014. He is the 18th Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy and was decorated for gallantry and commended for exceptional service to the Navy. He held the portfolio of Additional Secretary to the President for Foreign Relations, and the Secretary to the Foreign Ministry from August 2020 to May 2022. He is a visiting lecturer at the University of Colombo, Defence Services Command and Staff College (Sri Lanka), Kotelawala Defence University and Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute. He is also a Fellow of Nautical Institute, London UK, and Guest Professor at Sichuan University and Leshan Normal University in China and an adjunct professor at National Institute of South China Sea Studies, Haikou, China. He has also been an editor and reviewer of a number of internationally renowned academic journals. In addition, he has served as the Director General of the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka as well. He is currently a PhD examiner for University of Colombo. Email: jayanathskc@yahoo.com.