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Iran War's Little Discussed 'Huge' Geopolitical Advantage for China

Hemant Adlakha



When Britain sent its first formal diplomatic mission to China in 1793, one of the participants from London, Peter Auber, remarked that the group had been “received with the utmost politeness, treated with the utmost hospitality, watched with the utmost vigilance and dismissed with the utmost civility”.

- Kerry Brown, [The Conversation](#)

“...dismissed with the utmost civility,” this is exactly what Kerry Brown, a professor of Chinese Politics at London’s King’s College, thought on watching online Donald Trump’s recent state visit (May 13-15) to China unfold. “History will probably judge Trump’s visit as one more landmark along the road to a world in which China has greater prominence,” Brown hastily went on to [add](#). Interestingly, like Professor Brown, the mainstream public opinion in the US and in the West, have [observed](#) it didn’t require much time and efforts “for US President Trump to be put

in his place in Beijing.”

Trump made history by failing to turn his China trip into ‘historic visit’

Yet, a section of the US media did go on to applaud the Trump visit “historic.” In a photo feature on May 14 — on the first day of the Trump-Xi summit talks, the US news agency the CNN put up a series of rare images of the two leaders, capturing different moments and salient moods — at a guard of honour at the welcome ceremony at the Tiananmen Square, at the Great Hall of the People, at the Temple of Heaven etc., (the photo feature was updated on May 15). The CNN photo [feature](#) described the event “historic,” for there were “grand displays of soft diplomacy, marking the first Beijing meeting for the longtime rivals in nearly a decade.”

Some in America, perhaps including Trump himself, deluded themselves by contrasting the recent visit with the historic Nixon "rapprochement" visit to Red China a little over half a century ago. Certainly, President Trump himself declared this visit was a “historic moment” on returning to the White House 48-hour later. It is worth recalling what Democratic Senator Mike Mansfield said about the Nixon visit in a December 1971 interview, a comment that went on to form the basis of one of the most enduring myths in foreign policy analysis. “Only a Republican, perhaps only a Nixon, could have made this break and gotten away with it,” Mike Minesfield had told an [interviewer](#). As it is clearly [evident](#) of the two visits — the only common factor is that both Nixon and Trump are Republican presidents — while Nixon’s marked a geopolitical turning point, Trump “scrapped a policy that combined hardheaded diplomacy with action to protect US interests and check Chinese power.”

However, what is intriguing is even experts and analysts in the US/West who have been opposing Trump’s so-called “detente” China visit, failed to see that the visit was taking place at a time of the decades-old “historic” anti-China bipartisan US consensus breaking up. On the contrary, the mainstream media and academia both focused on how Xi sought to use the crisis created by Trump’s disastrous war on Iran to strengthen China’s bargaining position.

Fractured anti-China bipartisan consensus on the Capitol Hill

Especially from the late years of President Obama’s 2nd term to the Trump 1.0 administration and during the Biden presidency, the anti-China bipartisan consensus was the singlemost issue

that kept the political elite in Washington united. That historic, unprecedented “unity” between “the Democrats and Republicans to engage in a great power competition against China” (Heer 2025) began to crumble, ironically, within a few months of Trump’s second homecoming into the White House last year. It is of import to recall, at the peak of anti-China bipartisan consensus in the Congress, Steve Bannon, a former White House aide under Trump in 2017, had [launched](#) a campaign to rally the West against China’s communist government.

With several years of a broad consensus on China policy that has held firm across administrations of both Democratic and Republican parties now beginning to show signs of breaking up, the US political elite is now questioning whether the so-called decades-old consensus was real. Alarmed by Trump stressing his “excellent phone call” with Xi early this year and in anticipation of the US President planning a trip to China this spring, a leading Washington-based US think tank on foreign policy initiated open debate on the fractured anti-China consensus by holding a televised discussion this January. Entitled “China and Congress: Is There Still a Bipartisan Consensus?”, the discussion [focused](#) on several leading questions, such as “Is anti-China consensus real?” “If so, what is it?” “How deep did it go?” “Does it still exist?” “Is it still relevant?” etc. and so on.

As a sign of fracturing consensus on China policy, the US corporate media and the opposition Democratic Party both came down heavily on Trump’s China visit and on the summit in Beijing. In its editorial on the eve of Trump’s China visit, the *Wall Street Journal* framed the Beijing summit as a test of whether Trump can be steered away from a “detente,” risking conceding core strategic interests. The US financial daily even [issued](#) a warning: Trump’s “personal” diplomacy and pursuit of deals could collide with Xi’s “anti-American purposes. Released on the day Trump returned from Beijing, a Senate Foreign Relations Democrats Statement [said](#), “The United States’ relationship with China is among the most consequential in the world and dialogue between the two countries is important to maintain. But President Trump failed to use his summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping to advance any objectives important to the American people.”

How the Iran war contributed in fracturing further anti-China consensus

It is indeed true the US anti-China bipartisan consensus had shown signs of breaking up long before Trump 2.0 began hailing “excellent” personal relationship with his Chinese counterpart. Three years ago, an American Enterprise Institute (AEI) analysis, while applauding the “bipartisan” unity on China displayed in the first hearing of the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party held on February 28, 2023, also [cautioned](#) at the same time on the ever-growing China threat, saying “a danger is not the same thing as agreeing on what to do about it.”

Confident that his “trademark,” “characteristic” individual dealmaker-style diplomacy will prevail over already under-pressure Xi Jinping, President Trump arrived in Beijing with the mindset of a conqueror. However, as mentioned above, Trump’s continuing humiliation in Iran empowered Xi enough to put the visitor in his place without taking long and with minimal efforts. This also explains the frustration of the Democratic Party Senators’ joint statement, saying “we are deeply disturbed by President Trump’s go-it-alone approach and to sacrifice American national security.” The Democratic Senators further expressed their anguish on Trump’s failure in confronting the Chinese President on China’s extensive support for the Iranian regime.

However, instead of touching down in Beijing as conqueror, to Trump’s own horror, a visibly subdued, voiceless, and facing a geopolitical disaster, the US President found himself seated in front of Xi seeking China’s help to end the stalemate in the Strait of Hormuz. The biggest fallout of Trump visiting China under the shadow of the US-Israel war on Iran was, observed Charlie Campbell — cited above — whether stalemate in Iran had sapped his mojo, or he was merely beset by jetlag, Trump appeared on the backfoot throughout his stint in the Middle Kingdom. In other words, Xi sought to use the crisis created by Trump’s disastrous war on Iran to strengthen China’s bargaining position.

In conclusion, the most damaging implications of the continuing Iranian resistance to the US military attack — hence, its geopolitical advantage for China, as [manifested](#) in the Democratic Party’s concerns “is not the criminality of the war, but that the debacle in the Middle East diverts resources and credibility from the central objective: *escalating the conflict with China*” (Emphasis added) As argued here, neither the US oligarchy nor the political elite in Washington will accept

the diminishing US position in the world, certainly not in China. It is precisely fearing this that the Democratic Party has criticized the Trump administration for being insufficiently concentrated on the confrontation with Beijing. As Democratic Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, told the media a couple of days before the Trump visit, “President Trump is going into this meeting terribly weakened, there’s a stalemate now. The Iranians are holding 20 percent of the world’s oil at risk.”