**Headline:** Beginning or End of the Tariff War Between the US and China?

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**[Article Body:]**

The patience, strategic thinking, and chess-like approach of China’s leadership have once again proven their strength. Even one of the oldest weekly publications in the world, the British conservative *Spectator*, ran a cover [story](https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/china-has-won-the-trade-war-with-trump/) with a title that says it all: ‘China Has Won the Trade War with Trump’. Notice the subtle message between the lines? In this battle – unnecessary and unequal from the start – on one side stood a sovereign state, and on the other, a capricious and not particularly thoughtful individual, US President Donald Trump.

Reactions across the American and Western media after the Geneva negotiations, which were brief and [officially](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/05/joint-statement-on-u-s-china-economic-and-trade-meeting-in-geneva/) declared ‘successful’ by both parties, were nearly unanimous: Trump’s charade and his so-called ‘Liberation Day’ ended not with a victory, but with [surrender](https://www.wsj.com/opinion/u-s-china-trade-deal-tariffs-donald-trump-xi-jinping-a561d16b?st=cWqmFH&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink). Just over a hundred days into his second term, Trump is already under intense domestic pressure. None of his campaign promises have been fulfilled, and worse, the damage he’s inflicted on American society, including on the oligarchs and big business, is proving irreversible.

Unlike in small vassal states like Macedonia, where US and EU ambassadors draw up blacklists of corrupt high-ranking officials, in the US, there is a wilful blindness to the president’s private business dealings and blatant conflicts of interest involving him and his family in more than 20 countries. The latest revelation? A ‘gift’ from Qatar – an ultra-luxurious, Air Force One-style jet that will be housed in Trump’s future presidential library.

Although some Western countries (the UK among the first) have already capitulated to Trump’s whims, and the EU is still gearing up for negotiations in the hope of a better deal, China’s initial victory is an enormous source of encouragement for the rest of the world. Bullies have no place in the international economic order. Of course, China is China – not everyone can emulate its strategy, but there are lessons to be learned: don’t rush, be patient, and let the big players open the way. With Trump, nothing is stable or predictable anyway – he may say one thing in the morning and the opposite by evening.

Paradoxically, it was Nixon who opened the doors by normalising trade relations, while Obama and George W. Bush allowed China’s membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Now [China](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/s7lu_e.pdf) appears to be the one defending that order – an order that is deeply neoliberal and unjust. But as some Western leftist economist friends of mine argue, the WTO still offers a better framework of international rules than Trump’s economic Darwinism and jungle tactics. Still, this is no time for euphoria. China, which long foresaw this and prepared for it, including through self-reliance, has only won the first battle. Not just the Trump administration, but the broader US and Western establishment view China as a primary economic [rival](https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1265100.shtml), if not an outright enemy. This tension won’t end with Trump’s first defeat – the only question is where and how the conflict will escalate next.

One expected tactic will be renewed pressure on smaller and more dependent countries to sever economic ties with China. In other words, a demand for loyalty pledges based on the authoritarian logic of ‘if you’re not with us, you’re against us’. This will be the real test of which countries can truly stand up for their national interests, even the smaller ones.

The [self-harm](https://geopoliticaleconomy.com/2025/02/11/trump-tariffs-accelerate-us-decline/) caused by Trump’s recklessness – to put it mildly – will cost the US economy dearly in the long run. America is no longer a credible partner; it behaves like the proverbial old woman with a hundred whims. Business requires stability and predictability. Yet the ones already feeling the worst consequences are the poorest – ironically, often the very people who voted for Trump, thinking he was ‘a man of the people’.

Unfortunately, Americans remain largely unaware of the catastrophic impact of their country’s foreign policy. Military expansion and imperial posturing rarely stir public outcry – people are far more sensitive to what affects their household budgets. Maybe that’s why this presidency could serve as a wake-up call, a moment for Americans to look beyond their fences. Why isn’t China yelling like Trump? Why do Chinese citizens live safer and more stable lives? What happens when a state invests in the common good instead of in an oligarchic clique that includes its own political elite?

The US – and the West more broadly – fears China’s success not abroad, but at home. China is everything they’re not: committed to poverty eradication, innovation, education, renewable energy, and environmental protection – in other words, to the future. Its foreign policy is not aggressive, but it is persuasive. China doesn’t seek isolation; on the contrary, it promotes bridge-building and cooperation that brings mutual benefit. At the same time, it is one of the few nations that has firmly and unapologetically shown the US it will not tolerate humiliation, threats, or coercion – and has responded with equally strong economic countermeasures.

While we in the Balkans argue with our neighbours over ‘shared history’, China advocates a ‘community of shared future for [mankind](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjbzhd/202403/t20240308_11256416.html)’. Of course, for even repeating these words, I risk being put on a blacklist by fact-checkers and Western-funded NGOs and think tanks obsessed with the ‘malign [influence](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202504/03/WS67edcbd1a3104d9fd381d60c.html) of China in the [Balkan](https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Foreign-malign-influence-in-Central-Europe-and-the-Western-Balkans.pdf) region’. They are part of a Western apparatus terrified by good examples that suggest the world could be different.

For the international left, the struggle is not over as long as the current global system of trade and economy, grounded in WTO norms and neoliberal globalisation, prevails. Among the few who have dug deeper into the structural roots of the crisis is Yanis [Varoufakis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nN1QmCsYuf0), who offered a brilliant analysis of the origins of America’s deficit through a systemic, historical lens, rather than merely blaming reckless management or oligarchic greed. He traced it back to capitalism itself and the post–World War II order, where the US rose as a superpower via wartime gains and the Marshall Plan – a strategy to build markets for its own benefit. The 2008 crisis and the austerity measures imposed by the EU are now coming back like a boomerang, hitting the US economy hard. This is how the vicious cycle was born – socialism for the rich, capitalism for the poor.

Unless this system is dismantled, the world will continue to teeter on the edge of new wars – wars for profit, wars for the sake of war – especially against those who seek peace and offer an alternative model of cooperation. That’s why this first battle is far from the end of the war. Beijing knows that very well.