

US-China trade dispute

China signals opening for trade talks with US

State media message suggests softening of Beijing's position, say analysts



The fallout from the trade war has begun to show in China's economic data, with factory activity in April dropping the most since 2023 © Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

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Chinese state media has said there would be “no harm” in holding trade talks with the Trump administration, indicating a softening of Beijing’s position as both sides look for a way out of their crushing tariff war.

The gesture comes as Trump has indicated he hopes to negotiate over trade and as the fallout has begun to show in China’s economic data, with factory activity in April [dropping the most since 2023](#) as export orders dried up.

Yuyuan Tantian, an account affiliated with state broadcaster CCTV, said in a social media post on China’s Weibo platform on Thursday that Beijing did not need to talk to the US before Washington took substantive action.

“But if the US wishes to engage with China, there’s no harm in it for China at this stage,” it said.

The lengthy post cited unnamed sources to note that US officials had “proactively reached out to China through various channels hoping to hold talks with the Chinese side on tariffs”.

It also highlighted US economic data, including empty ports and a [GDP contraction in the first quarter](#), saying Washington was “definitely the more anxious party” for negotiations.

“If it is talks, the door is wide open,” said Yuyuan Tiantian. “If it is a fight, we’ll see it through to the end.”

Analysts said the language represented a softening of Beijing’s position from last week when the commerce ministry indicated the US would need to drop its steep [levies](#) on China before negotiations could begin.

Andrew Polk, co-founder of Trivium China, an advisory group, said the post seemed “to be laying the groundwork to come to the table”.

“By painting the US as the more eager, more anxious, more pressured party they are trying to portray themselves as coming from a place of strength,” he said. “This should play well with the domestic audience and give them cover to start negotiations.”

Zichen Wang, author of the Pekingnology newsletter and research fellow at the Center for China and Globalization think-tank in Beijing, said the posts from Yuyuan Tiantian and another social media account indicated China appeared ready for trade talks.

“This signalling method through social media accounts remains relatively novel in the Chinese context,” he said, though Wang noted Beijing had also used a social media account for signalling purposes during the first trade war with the US.

Wang added that the US “must demonstrate respect, refrain from hostile rhetoric and exhibit genuine sincerity” for any meaningful progress to occur.

Washington and Beijing engaged in a tit-for-tat escalation after Trump started raising tariffs on Chinese goods in February. The additional levies have reached 145 per cent, while Beijing has imposed a 125 per cent retaliatory duty.

Trump on Wednesday told reporters he expected to speak to China’s President Xi Jinping at some point. In recent weeks, Trump has made multiple claims about talks with China that people familiar with the matter in Beijing and Washington have said are untrue.

Jamieson Greer, the US trade representative, on Wednesday told Fox News that the US and China had not held any trade negotiations since Trump took office in January.

Trump wants to negotiate a trade agreement directly with Xi, but Chinese officials have made clear to his administration the two sides would have to reach some kind of deal before the two leaders could speak.

“Right now . . . they’re having tremendous difficulty because their factories are not doing business,” said Trump, adding that the US could do without Chinese goods.

“Somebody said: ‘Oh, the shelves are going to be open.’ Well, maybe the children will have two dolls instead of 30 dolls . . . and maybe the two dolls will cost a couple bucks more than they would normally.”

His comments follow direct warnings from big US retailers, including Walmart and Target, who told Trump in meetings at the White House that the trade war would result in empty shelves at some point.

While the two countries remain at an impasse in the trade war, both sides have softened the impact of some of the tariffs by granting exemptions to crucial goods such as iPhones and chemical imports.

Still, the stand-off has begun to hit both economies. Traffic at US ports has rapidly declined while in China, export-dependent factories have begun furloughing workers.

“The key pain point for China in the current test of endurance between China and the US is the health of the job market,” said Lynn Song, chief economist for greater China at ING.

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