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Emerging International Personality

China is truly now in the driver's seat of international politics in the contemporary global order. May 2026 witnessed sort of changing international landscape. Donald Trump the POTUS (President of the United States) and Vladimir Putin President of Russia visited President of China, Xi Jinping back-to-back. China was found working on its diplomatic protocol with USA and Russia. Trump stayed in China for three days, May 13-15, 2026; while Putin's 25th official visit to China lasted for two days, May 19-20, 2026.

The visit marked that China now possesses the international status and influence to deal with US on almost equal terms. It is USA which seems to be recalibrating its foreign relations with first with Russia and now with China. Visit was marked by number of similarities and dissimilarities over China's treatment of Trump and Putin. Summit looked similar: both leaders were welcomed at Tiananmen Square with formal handshakes and ceremonial guards, a military band; greetings were extended generously by the officials to both the leaders; children were deployed to wave flowers and flags to both the leaders; both the leaders held meeting with Xi at the Great Hall of the People adjacent to Square.

Marked dissimilarities were noted: First, when most of the international media projected that Trump-Xi meeting was empty; while Putin-Xi meeting was substantive. Secondly, Trump was found stepping back on his tough-on-China posture which USA had long cultivated; while political trust between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin was re-emphasized with their commitment to 'no-limits partnership'. Thirdly, Trump was taken to a private tour of the 'Temple of Heaven' and imperial gardens of Zhongnanhai in China which is a former imperial garden and presently serves as headquarters of China's top leaderships. On the other hand, Putin spent most of the time with Xi inside the 'Great Hall of the People' over tea talking their relations and watching photo exhibition of Sino-Russian relations. Fourthly, China discussed with USA trade, Taiwan and ongoing conflict in West Asia; whereas with Putin it discussed the ways to deepening their strategic partnership. Fifthly, Xi understood well about Trump's love for Camera and VIP treatment and the same was meted out to him. On the other hand, Xi emphasized substance over symbols while treating Putin. China has altogether different set of relations and foreign policy orientations with both these powers on the globe.

With USA, China focused on the need to maintain a relatively stable relationship mitigating tensions over trade between two largest economies of the world. Xi prevailed on Trump asking to consider China as partner rather than a rival. Trump and Xi agreed to work to build constructive relationship of strategic stability. However, they did not sign any 'Joint Declaration' as well as agreements. Though, once Trump had left China, that both the countries announced the details of several accords, but at different times: USA readout highlighted the denuclearization of Iran and North Korea; that included purchase of US agricultural products worth 17 billion dollars annually and also that China would purchase 200 Boeing jets; while the China accorded issues raised by USA relatively little attention and stressed Taiwan. Xi was explicit that US mishandling of Taiwan could lead to confrontation between China and USA. China has also strained its bilateral relations with Japan over Taiwan. Hence, both USA and China raised concerns over accelerated remilitarization of Japan.

With Russia, China emphasized to deepen the partnership both strategically and economically. Putin went on record accepting oil and gas i.e., energy as the driving force of their bilateral relationship. China signed over 40 cooperation agreements with Russia covering areas such as trade, technology, cultural exchanges, science and technology, and media exchanges. They signed a 'Joint Declaration' stating Russia and China as important centers of power in a multipolar world. Both the leaders together met the press and attended and addressed the opening ceremony of the 'China-Russia Years of Education'.

China entered into more agreements with Russia than USA. Chinese diplomacy was indeed different for both the powers. First, Russia and China share the long-term strategic objective of weakening the Western international order centered on the US and to erode its global influence. Hence, both these friends are clear on list of their friends and enemies within global communities. Secondly, USA seems to be isolated in global politics especially with China; and it was witnessed in US war on Iran. On the other hand, Russia and China are on the same boat on most of the global issues and they have proven set of friends in international system. Thirdly, Trump has been trying hard to strike a wedge between China and Russia, which has been witnessed on many occasions. USA has been quite soft on Russia, and at times has also tried to court Putin at the cost of European allies.

Fourthly, China claims Taiwan, the island democracy as its own. Russia is closely aligned with China on this issue. However, US maintain an ambiguous stance, and informally provide arms to Taiwan and also back Taiwan's stands. Overall, Trump and Putin visit to China added tremendous value to its international personality, providing Xi to reveal its diplomatic prowess.

—BK