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President Trump hints at compromise ahead of US-China trade talks

US and Chinese officials are heading to Switzerland this weekend to talk about the trade war. At one time, both Washington and Beijing were promising not to back down. But the two sides have recently been signaling a willingness to compromise.

The World*May 9, 2025***By Matthew Bell**

President Donald Trump speaks to reporters after David Perdue was sworn in as US ambassador to China during a ceremony in the Oval Office of the White House, May 7, 2025, in Washington.

Mark Schiefelbein/AP

US officials are heading to Switzerland to meet with China's vice premier this weekend for the highest-level known talks between the two sides since President

Donald Trump returned to the White House in January.

In a social media post on Friday morning, Trump [floated the idea](#) of reducing tariffs on Chinese goods from 145% to 80%.

This followed something that Trump [said to reporters on Thursday](#) in the Oval Office: “You can’t get any higher. It’s at 145. So, we know it’s coming down.”

Trump, in his social media post, also called on China’s leaders to open up their markets to US goods.

The talks in Geneva are not expected to produce a major breakthrough on US-China trade, but they could lower the temperature on a trade war that’s causing economic pain across the globe.

Trump said that the [talks in Geneva](#) — between US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and China’s top economic official, the vice premier, He Lifeng — will be “very, very interesting.”

In recent weeks, the president had claimed that trade discussions were underway with China. But Beijing denied that any negotiations were taking place.

Trump would not say which side asked for the meeting in Switzerland.

“You know, they very much want to make a deal. We can all play games. Who made the first call? Who didn’t make the — it doesn’t matter. It only matters what happens in that room,” he said. “But I will tell you that China very much wants to make a deal, and we’ll see how that works out.”

On Wednesday, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian acknowledged that the [talks in Geneva were happening](#) this weekend.

But he said it was the US side that made the request. He said China has not changed its position and is firmly opposed to the US tariffs. Lin added that Beijing will not

give in to pressure tactics or coercion.

After Trump imposed staggering [new tariffs on China in early April](#), the Chinese government responded with a PR campaign expressing defiance.

[Eswar Prasad](#) is a professor of trade policy and economics at Cornell University.

“We seem to be dropping from sky-high tariffs to tariffs that are just skimming the edge of the stratosphere. Eighty percent is still an enormous tariff barrier,” Prasad said. “But certainly, it seems to suggest something of a comedown from the even higher tariff rates that Trump had earlier proposed on US imports from China. And it does suggest that he is willing to be somewhat flexible in the negotiations with China, but not too flexible.”

If tariffs on imports from China end up staying at 80%, Prasad said that American consumers will certainly feel the pain.

Chinese negotiators know that, and it will give them leverage at the negotiating table. But China is already feeling the impact of this trade war.

Numbers from Beijing on Friday show a rise in Chinese goods sold in Southeast Asia, Europe and the Middle East. But Prasad said that won't make up for what China is losing out on — by being effectively shut out of the US.

“China cannot credibly say, OK, to heck with the US market, we're just going to sell our products to other countries,” Prasad said. “The problem is that practically every other country in the world, including some of China's major export markets in the European Union, in Asia, including Japan and so on, these countries are not doing terribly well. So, they don't want a flood of Chinese exports landing up on their doorstep.”

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