GEOPOLITICS

A TRUMP-XI-PUTIN MEETING IN SHENZHEN? WHAT BHARAT SHOULD WATCH

By **Kamlesh Bhagatkar**, *Politician, Author & Geopolitical Analyst · 12 November 2026*

On Wednesday, 11 November, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke by phone with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The call was to prepare for President Donald Trump's trip to the APEC summit in China next week and President Xi Jinping's visit to Florida for the G20 summit in December. According to the State Department, as reported by Reuters, the two "agreed on the importance of meaningful leader-level conversations to advance goals such as peace and denuclearization, including at any potential trilateral leaders meeting with Russia."

Beijing's account was different. Reuters noted that China's readout made no mention of denuclearisation or of a three-way summit with Russia. Xinhua called the call "positive and constructive" and quoted Wang as saying that the present stability in China-US relations had not come easily.

The APEC summit is in Shenzhen on 18 and 19 November. Rubio told reporters on Tuesday that work was under way to arrange a meeting there of Trump, Xi and Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Reuters reported. Trump said on Sunday that he thought he would meet both leaders in Shenzhen to discuss ending the war in Iran and denuclearisation.

Who wants this meeting, and who is cautious

Moscow has been the keenest. On 3 November, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "We hope it'll be finalized in the coming days. Of course, the main organizing force here is our Chinese friends as the host party," according to The Moscow Times. Kyiv Post reported that Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov had said on 25 October that the three capitals were in principle ready to hold such a meeting.

China has said much less. In public, its Foreign Ministry has spoken only of being "in communication with relevant parties regarding the meeting between the Chinese and Russian heads of state", The Moscow Times reported. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who met Xi in late October, told the broadcaster ARD: "From his perspective, there is absolutely no preparation underway for a Ukraine summit involving the US, Russia, and China," according to Kyiv Post.

On nuclear arms, Beijing has been plain. Last month its Foreign Ministry said China's "nuclear strength is by no means at the same level with that of the US and Russia" and that it would be "neither fair, reasonable nor realistic to ask China to join the so-called trilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations at this stage," Reuters reported.

Ukraine objects to the whole idea. Its Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said a meeting of the leaders of Russia, China and the US "would encourage Putin to continue this war," according to Kyiv Post.

What it means for Bharat

India is not part of this conversation, and I do not think we should pretend that does not matter. Three of the subjects on the table touch us directly.

The first is the war in Iran. According to the World Trade Organization, fertiliser shipments out of the Strait of Hormuz came almost to a standstill after the conflict began in February, and India had sourced almost two-thirds of its nitrogenous fertiliser imports from that region. Anything that ends the war helps Indian farmers and our import bill, whoever brokers it.

The second is nuclear weapons, and here my concern is sharper. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that China now has around 620 nuclear warheads and is expanding its arsenal faster than any other country. SIPRI also says India's own modernisation is increasingly focused on long-range weapons able to reach targets throughout China. Beijing's argument has some arithmetic behind it: SIPRI notes that even if China passes 1,000 warheads by 2030, that will still be only about a quarter of each of the current Russian and US stockpiles. But in my view, any denuclearisation talk that treats China as too small to limit, while China builds faster than anyone, leaves India facing a neighbour whose arsenal grows without check. If the three leaders do discuss nuclear arms, the question for New Delhi is whether China's build-up is on the agenda at all.

The third is Russia. Washington is pressing India over purchases of Russian oil. The Tribune reported that the US Senate recently passed the Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia Act, which seeks to penalise major buyers of Russian energy, and named India and China. An end to the war in Ukraine would take much of that pressure away. At the same time, Russia's ties with China are deepening. On 3 November, Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov was in Beijing and hailed an "unprecedentedly high" strategic partnership between the two, The Moscow Times reported. Russia has been our partner for decades. I read its eagerness to sit with Washington and Beijing, with China as host, as a reminder that Moscow's priorities are its own.

None of this calls for alarm. The meeting is still unconfirmed. Peskov hoped on 3 November that it would be finalised "in the coming days", and on Tuesday Rubio was still describing the work as under way. Beijing has not acknowledged it in public. I think India's best answer to great-power bargaining is the one it already uses: keep working ties with each power separately, so that no deal among them can be made without counting what India wants.

What to watch next

The first test is Shenzhen on 18 and 19 November: whether the three leaders meet, and whether China's account of it mentions nuclear arms. The second is Miami. The G20 Leaders' Summit is on 14 and 15 December at Trump National Doral, Business Today reported, and the government has not yet formally announced Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation, according to The Tribune, though a government document it saw shows planning for the visit has begun. Business Today reported in September that a Modi-Trump bilateral meeting is likely on the sidelines if the visit goes ahead.

Sources

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- WTO: Fertilizer trade impacted by Strait of Hormuz conflict
- SIPRI: Increasing focus on nuclear weapons amid heightened escalation risks, new SIPRI Yearbook out now
- The Tribune: India-US ties in focus as Modi all set to attend Miami G20 Summit in December
- Business Today: G20 Summit, PM Modi expected to travel to US; bilateral with Trump likely on the cards, say sources



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