

## **U.S.–China Cooperation within APEC 2025 – Rebuilding Trust and Mitigating Geopolitical Risks**

### **Background**

As global tensions intensify in what many observers call “*Cold War 2*”, the Asia-Pacific region faces increasing uncertainty. Relations between the United States and China—the two largest APEC members—remain strained over issues such as Taiwan, North Korea, trade issues and technological competition. Yet, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) remains one of the few multilateral platforms capable of fostering constructive dialogue and practical collaboration between the two powers, and APEC members overall.

With APEC 2025 hosted in Gyeongju, South Korea, the forum provides an opportunity for both nations to de-escalate geopolitical risks, rebuild mutual trust, and cooperate on non-political, people-centered issues.

### **Key Areas for Cooperation**

#### **1. Avoiding Geopolitical Escalation**

- **Crisis Communication Channels:** Use APEC as a neutral space to maintain informal communication on sensitive regional issues such as Taiwan and North Korea.
- **Mutual diplomatic inclusion in dialogue with North Korea.** Including both sides, China and the USA, in possible negotiations with North Korea. Mitigating strategic risks related to North Korea (example: Missile test on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2025 ahead of USA-South Korea meeting)
- **Confidence-Building Measures:** Promote maritime safety, joint disaster response exercises, and transparent communication to prevent miscalculations
- **Economic Stability Dialogue:** Focus discussions on maintaining stable trade and investment flows despite political difference.

#### **2. Rebuilding Trust through People-to-People Exchanges**

- Educational Cooperation: Expand academic networks and academic dialogues under the APEC Education Strategy. Engaging in dialogue with academia on how to solve geopolitical and geoeconomic issues.
- Cultural and Tourism Initiatives: Encourage mutual tourism promotion, cultural exhibitions, and city-to-city partnerships that enhance mutual understanding.
- Narrative Correction: Support research and media dialogues to address misperceptions about China and the United States, fostering mutual understanding and empathy.

### **3. Public Health Collaboration**

- Crisis Preparedness: Strengthen coordination mechanisms to prevent future pandemics, learning from the challenges of COVID-19.
- Information Sharing: Build an APEC-wide real-time health data system for early warning and transparent communication.
- Vaccine and Medical Supply Cooperation: Jointly secure medical supply chains to ensure regional resilience.

### **4. Cyber security and Digital Safety**

Background: While cybercrimes have become security problem all over the world, some APEC members including South Korea and China have become particularly vulnerable to cyber crimes organized in the territory of Cambodia and Myanmar, as well as “voice phishing” schemes organized by criminal networks in both countries. Dealing with these network requires coordinated responses not only on bilateral but multilateral level.

- Joint Frameworks on Cybercrime Prevention: Develop shared guidelines to combat online financial crimes, hacking, and digital misinformation.
- Technology Ethics Dialogue: Promote regular exchanges between cybersecurity experts, legal scholars, and tech industries.
- Digital Trust: Encourage APEC members to harmonize data protection standards to ensure secure cross-border information flows.

### **Policy Implications**

APEC's non-binding, consensus-based structure makes it an ideal venue for soft cooperation even amid great-power rivalry.

U.S.–China collaboration in these non-political areas can rebuild confidence, reduce misunderstandings, and stabilize the regional environment.

By prioritizing people-centered trust building, health security, and digital safety, APEC can reaffirm its role as a stabilizing force in an increasingly polarized world.