



A War Beyond Trade (3)

Summary: the prospects of a trade deal have improved. We see a 50% likelihood of a deal being reached on Nov 29. A trade deal would likely lead to a stronger RMB. It would be negative for commodity demand and the property sector as China feels less pressure to roll out stimulus measures. A trade deal may end a battle for now but US-China relations will likely remain tense over the coming years.

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President Xi and President Trump talked over the phone on November 1. According to a press release from China, the call was initiated by the US. The two presidents talked about the upcoming G20 meeting where they will likely hold a bilateral meeting on Nov 29. They also exchanged views on North Korea.

The prospects of a trade deal have improved. Compared with three months ago, both sides likely are feeling more pain from the trade war. This change is more pronounced on the US side, with the stock market down significantly in October. Note that bilateral negotiations were stuck before this call. The US asked China to offer a list of promises for the meeting at the G20, but China has not done so; likely due to a lack of trust. The call, initiated by the US, will likely mean negotiations will resume on the working level and pave the way for a deal on Nov 29.

What would the two countries agree on in a trade deal? It would likely include a promise from China to buy a large amount of US goods such as agricultural products and airplanes. China would likely lower tariffs on many US products such as cars and promise to open part of the service sector to US firms. The US may ask China to strengthen the RMB against the US dollar to the level before the trade war broke out. If the US persists on the RMB issue, China would likely follow the request and let the RMB appreciate somewhat. There would likely be some promise from China to improve protection in terms of intellectual property.

How likely is it that a deal will be reached? At this stage, we see a 50% likelihood that the two Presidents will reach some agreement on November 29. The path of the negotiations over the past six months shows that positive signals may not always lead to positive outcomes. The negotiations are not just about trade. Other issues such as the US mid-term elections and North Korea may complicate the negotiations as well.

A trade deal would help China mitigate the downside risks to growth in 2019. It would also make it less likely that China loosens controls over local government financing vehicles and the property market. China would still likely cut tax

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(including VAT), as President Xi [signaled](#) in a meeting with private entrepreneurs yesterday, but it would become less urgent and the size may not be as aggressive.

One important issue to highlight is that a trade deal may end a battle, but it does not mean the end of the economic cold war. Even if tariffs are removed, the messages from US Vice President Pence's [speech](#) still haunt bilateral relations. The strong bipartisan consensus in Washington DC against China is unlikely to change. Legislation aimed at China on technology and investment was recently introduced, and we may see more disputes on those fronts.



Appendix 1

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