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CHINA

China's twofold approach to international relations

While Europe is caught up in the Ukrainian crisis and the United States are confronting a highly problematic reality in the Middle East, China continues expanding its influence around the world.

A recent tour in Latin America by Chinese President Xi Jinping has been hailed as a great success by the Chinese media which is typical in similar circumstances, but it is a fact that China has now a firmer foothold in the region with the creation of a China-Latin American forum and closer relations particularly with Brazil which is already one of China's major economic partner with a trade exchange that last year exceeded US\$90 billion.

During the tour which took place from the 15th to the 23rd of July, President Xi also attended the 6th summit of the so-called BRICS nations - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - held in the Brazilian port city of Fortaleza. A significant outcome of the summit was the decision to set up a development bank and a contingent reserve fund which implies a dissatisfaction by the five countries with the performance of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

As reported in the Chinese media, China has explained that this initiative is not meant to undermine or rival the two Bretton Woods institutions but it has also expressed concern for their alleged inertness in regions of the world that "crying for help and left untended due to lack of either resources or willingness."

China's international strategy looks like following two parallel lines. One consists in maintaining good relations with the United States and its allies, and the other aims at gaining moral and political authority amongst the developing nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America by fostering their claims for a more equitable share of global wealth.

This strategy requires a constant balancing of the two lines, hence China's repeated reassurances of its goodwill towards the U.S. and the Western Alliance as it did in the wake of President Xi's tour when the Chinese media reported that China's increasing close interaction with Latin America is just “a natural outcome of the development needs of both sides that poses no threat to anyone.”

Another example of China's endeavour to balance its twofold approach to international relations is President Xi's stopover in Portugal on his way back to Beijing. The stopover was officially described as an opportunity to enhance pragmatic cooperation in trade, technology and investment between the two countries in view of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of their comprehensive strategic partnership next year. Yet, notwithstanding the historical links of Portugal with China through the former Portuguese colony of Macao, the stopover in Portugal can be seen as a gesture of appeasement towards the Western alliance where Portugal plays a significant role as one of the 12 founding members of the NATO alliance.