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CHINA

China ready to play a greater role in United Nations peacekeeping

All the fuss caused by the American media about China's President Xi Jinping's first official visit to the United States proved to be much ado about nothing. As it was to be expected, the visit didn't resolve the main points of contention between the two countries but it raised some hope for improvement.

President Obama and President Xi seemed quite relaxed as they appeared together, giving the impression they were having a time off from their common concerns over Islamic terrorism and the seemingly uncontrollable Islamic caliphate. As a matter of fact, even if the United States and China are at odds on a number of issues, they are tied by strong mutual interests that neither country can afford sacrificing.

Trade exchange between the two nations exceeded \$555 billion last year and, at the current rhythm, it will reach \$1 trillion in 2024. It is estimated that in the next five years China will import commodities worth \$10 trillion and over 500 million Chinese will make visits abroad feeding the tourist industries of many countries around the world. US is China's biggest trade partner and as a consequence a huge slice of the "Chinese economic pie" ends up on the American plate.

Washington remains firmly opposed to an increasingly assertive China that is waging cyber-attacks on America's public and private enterprises, aggressively threatening neighbours in the South China Sea and

manipulating its currency for economic advantage. China has also hugely increased defence spending which is causing misgiving to the US who, on the other hand, spend four times as much.

However rhetorical, the statements that came out of the summit kindled some sparks of optimism as China vowed to implement cyber security measures and made further commitments on climate change. Nonetheless only time will tell if words will translate into deeds considering that an agreement on cyber security had already been signed two years ago with no apparent effect.

One of the most surprising announcements made by President Xi Jinping was during his speech at the United Nations General Assembly when he said that China planned to set up a United Nations permanent peacekeeping force of 8,000 troops and would provide \$100 million to the African Union to create an immediate response unit capable of responding to emergencies. In addition he also promised a \$1 billion donation to the United Nations for a “peace and development fund.”

Mr. Xi appearance at the United Nations was his first since he became China’s president in 2012. He seemed eager to impress his international audience. Next year, China will assume the leadership of the G-20, the group of the world’s 20 major economies.

At a special summit on peacekeeping convened by President Obama, Mr. Xi said China would supplement the big-ticket items he had already outlined with a helicopter squad for peacekeeping operations in Africa. China, he added, would also train 5,000 peacekeepers from other countries over the next five years.