

## Obama, Gates And Clinton In Asia: U.S. Expands Military Build-Up In The East

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President Barack Obama arrived in Mumbai, India on November 6 and announced \$10 billion in business deals with his host country which he claimed will contribute to 50,000 new American jobs. By some accounts half the transactions will be for India's purchase of U.S. military equipment and half the new jobs will be created in the defense sector.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is completing a nearly two-week tour of the Asia-Pacific region which will culminate in meeting up with Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen in Australia on November 8 to among other matters secure the use of the country's military bases.

Gates will then visit Malaysia, "amid concern in the region over China's growing economic and naval power" [1], to solidify military ties with the Southeast Asian nation as Obama moves to Indonesia, South Korea and Japan after his first visit to India on what will be his longest trip abroad since assuming the presidency.

Obama styles himself "America's first Pacific president," having been born in Hawaii and spending part of his childhood in Indonesia, and his administration has targeted Asia for the expansion of U.S. military influence and presence.

Several months ago a Chinese report warned that his visit to India was designed in large part to "secure \$5 billion worth of arms sales," a deal that "would make the US replace Russia as India's biggest arms supplier" and "help India curb China's rise." [2]

What he has accomplished is "a \$5 billion sale for 10 of Boeing's C-17 cargo planes" which represents "the sixth biggest arms deal in U.S. history."

"This and the pending \$60 billion deal with Saudi Arabia will certainly help to jump-start the economy, as they [arms sales] have for the past fifty years." [3]

Job creation in the U.S. is an abysmal failure except in the military sector.

"Boeing said the C-17 deal with India will support 650 suppliers in 44 U.S. states and support the company's own C-17 production facility in Long Beach, California, for an entire year." [4]

Other deals included an \$822 million contract for General Electric to provide 107 F414 engines for the Tejas lightweight multirole jet fighter being developed by India.

Rahul Bedi, Indian-based correspondent for Jane's Defence Weekly, recently revealed that since U.S. sanctions enforced after India's 1998 nuclear tests were lifted in 2001 "India has

concluded and signed arms contract worth \$12 billion. This includes maritime reconnaissance aircraft (Boeing P-81), missiles, artillery guns, radars and transport aircraft.

“India is also buying heavy lift transport for the air force (C-17s). An artillery radar contract was the first of its kind worth \$142 million. Over the next years, India is going to go for repeat orders of C-17s [Globemaster IIIs], C-130J Super Hercules [military transport aircraft], etc.” and “these contracts are worth another 7 to 8 billion dollars.” [5]

The projected purchase of 126 multirole combat aircraft will account for another \$10 billion and other contracts for assorted military helicopters are also being pursued by Washington. What is in question is \$15 billion in weapons deals.

With already concluded and potential contracts, “we are talking about very, very big business. We are talking about the shifting of Indian military hardware, completely.

“Shifting from Russian components to American ones is a big shift. In the mid-90s, the Pentagon had assessed that by 2015 [it] would like India to source it’s 25 per cent of hardware. They seem to be well on their way in meeting their target.

“The profile of Indian military hardware is becoming US-oriented. This will bring definitive change in Indian military doctrine because it’s dependent on [imported] equipment.”

The U.S. is also pressuring the Indian government to sign several military-related agreements, including a Logistics Support Agreement which could prove “dangerous because the use of US ports by Indians will be zero while the US can or may use Indian bases frequently because of their presence in the region. So, technically speaking, if the US should have problem[s] with Iran or Pakistan they, under the agreement, may use our bases. Indian soil can become a lurching pad for refuelling or servicing.” [6]

Addressing the U.S.-India Business Council in Mumbai on November 6, Obama said: “There is no reason why India cannot be our top trading partner (from 12th position now)....I’m absolutely sure that the relationship between India and the US is going to be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century.” [7] That is, one of the decisive political-military alliances of the century.

In the words of Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, “The simple truth is that India’s rise, and its strength and progress on the global stage, is deeply in the strategic interest of the United States.” [8]

Obama will leave India on November 8, when Clinton, Gates and Mullen gather in Australia, and head to Indonesia where he will exploit his childhood history and then to the G-20 meeting in South Korea and the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit in Japan.

Indian troops are currently participating with U.S. airborne forces in this year’s annual Yudh Abhyas joint military exercises “involving airborne specialist operations in sub-zero temperatures in Alaska” of a sort that could be put to use along India’s Himalayan border with China in the event of an armed conflict like that which occurred in 1962.

“The exercise will test the mettle of the Indian Army men in performing operations in extreme cold conditions in Alaska where the temperature hovers around minus 20 degree Celsius.

“The exercise is designed to promote cooperation between the two militaries to promote interoperability through the combined military decision-making process, through battle tracking and manoeuvring forces, and exchange of tactics, techniques and procedures.” [9] Last year’s Yudh Abhyas, held in India, was the largest U.S.-Indian military exercise to date. [10]

From September 29-October 4 personnel from the Indian army, air force and navy trained with the U.S.’s 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit at the latter’s base in Okinawa in the East China Sea during the Habu Nag 2010 “bilateral amphibious training exercise between India and the United States, designed to increase interoperability during amphibious operations,” the first time “the Indian military had the chance to work alongside Marines in this situation.” [11]

“Okinawa is located close to China and has a significant US presence where several military bases are concentrated.” [12]

Clinton began her six-nation tour of the Asia-Pacific region on October 27 by visiting a military base in Hawaii, meeting with the head of U.S. Pacific Command and assuring the foreign minister of Japan that the U.S. is prepared to honor its military commitments under terms of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in the event of further clashes between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea. [13]

The next day U.S. and Japanese warships participated in an advanced ballistic missile interception test off the coast of Hawaii and on November 2 the U.S. launched the two-week Orient Shield 11 (XI) military exercise with 400 U.S. National Guard and 200 Japanese troops in the latter’s nation.

“Since World War II concluded, the United States has worked to build a better relationship with Japan. In 1960, the U.S. and Japan signed the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, a binding agreement for both countries to support each other from enemy attack.” As such, “United States Army Japan facilitates a two-week Orient Shield exercise in Japan each fall....”

In the words of the commander of the Japanese forces involved this year, “Our main goal is to enhance the interoperability between the U.S. and Japan.” [14]

Since Hillary Clinton spoke this July of U.S. intentions to intervene in territorial disputes in the South China Sea between China and its neighbors, the Pentagon has conducted three joint military exercises with South Korea, including in the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan/East Sea, and one with Vietnam in the South China Sea.

Last month the U.S. led a 14-nation Proliferation Security Initiative [15] naval exercise off the southern port city of Busan, “marking the first time for South Korea to host such a drill.” [16] In addition to the U.S. guided missile destroyer USS Lassen and two South Korean destroyers, a Japanese ship and personnel from Australia, Canada and France participated.

In late September China’s Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo warned that “A series of military drills initiated by the US and China’s neighboring countries showed that the US wants to increase its military presence in Asia.”

“The purpose of these military drills launched by the US is to target multiple countries

including China, Russia and North Korea and to build up strategic ties with its allied countries like Japan and South Korea.” [17]

Secretary of State Clinton arrived in New Zealand on November 4. Like South Korea, Australia, Malaysia and now Japan (which has announced plans to deploy Self-Defense Forces medical personnel), New Zealand has troops serving in Afghanistan.

“New Zealand has participated in the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan, with 140 personnel carrying out reconstruction work in Bamiyan and 70 special forces troops in the country believed to be operating in Kabul.”

Her visit revived and expanded military ties between the U.S and New Zealand that had been dormant since 1986, “mark[ing] the end of a row over nuclear weapons dating back almost 25 years,” according to Prime Minister John Key.

“U.S. and New Zealand troops could train together” again, the press reported, and two days before Clinton’s arrival the New Zealand government published a 100-page defense white paper, the first in 13 years, detailing “closer military relations with the United States, Australia, Britain and Canada, as well as enhanced front-line capabilities.

“On the ground the army will get more front-line soldiers and Special Air Service elite troops, while on the seas the Anzac frigates will be upgraded....Hillary Clinton arrived in New Zealand for a three-day visit, prompting one newspaper to suggest it was a perfect gift for her.” [18]

Though not of the same scope, the New Zealand white paper follows one by Australia last year that calls for a post-World War Two record \$72 billion arms build-up. [19]

Clinton’s next stop was Australia, where Pentagon chief Gates had also arrived to “reinforce the U.S. commitment to the region with a longstanding U.S. ally and an increasingly close partner,” according to Defense Department Press Secretary Geoff Morrell.

Clinton, Gates and U.S. military chief Admiral Mullen will meet with Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith and Defense Minister John Faulkner on November 8 for the 25th anniversary Australia-United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) meeting.

The Pentagon spokesman added that “This year’s talks will cover a broad range of foreign policy, defense and strategic issues, including ongoing military operations in Afghanistan,” noting that “Australia is the largest non-NATO contributor to the International Security Assistance Force” in Afghanistan. [20]

Morrell emphasized the meeting would strengthen the U.S.’s alliance with Australia and would contribute to increased collaboration with regional partners to ensure “maritime security” in Asia. As a news source put it, “US officials often employ the phrase ‘maritime security’ to refer to concerns about China’s assertive stance over territorial rights in the Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea.” [21]

A local news report recently divulged that “Australia has agreed to a major escalation of military co-operation with the US,” including “more visits by American ships, aircraft and troops and their forces exercising here regularly....”

“Access to Australian Defence Force facilities will allow the US to step up its military

presence in the Asia-Pacific region...as concern grows about China's military expansion."

Three "big announcements" on military cooperation will be made after the Australia-United States Ministerial consultations and "Increased numbers of US personnel in Australian facilities are expected within months, and the tempo of military exercises will be stepped up as that happens." [22]

The military installations that the Pentagon will gain access to are expected to include army and air force bases at Townsville, the new Coonawarra naval base in Darwin, the Stirling naval base on Garden Island and the Bradshaw Field Training Area.

"The Australian development is part of a new US strategy to step up its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region after reviews of strategic policy concluded that the Bush government's attempts to project power from North America were not working." [23]

When Clinton arrived in Melbourne on November 6 she "signalled increased military cooperation with Australia."

"Easier use of Australian bases, more joint training programmes and more visits by ships, planes and troops are proposed. There could also be stockpiling of US military equipment and supplies at local bases, and a joint space tracking facility that would monitor missiles, satellites and space junk."

In her own words: "I think it's going to be an issue of discussion at AUSMIN (Australia-US ministerial level talks Monday) about the cooperation on a range of matters, including space, cyber-security and so much else."

New Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard confirmed that her administration would "welcome the United States making greater use of our ports and our training facilities, our test-firing ranges." [24]

The focus of U.S. military strategy has shifted from Europe, subjugated through NATO expansion, and Africa, subordinated under U.S. Africa Command, to Asia. An Asia-Pacific analogue of NATO and AFRICOM is being expanded by the day.

## Notes

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Rediff News, November 5, 2010

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21) Radio Netherlands, November 4, 2010

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24) Deutsche Presse-Agentur, November 6, 2010

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