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Sent: Monday, May 14, 2012 2:21 PM
To: H
Subject: FW: Walter Russell Mead on the recent Asia trip

This is a terrific piece and well worth the trip to India to produce!

May 8, 2012

Asia: The Grand Design

by Walter Russell Mead

The image was a triumph for India: Secretary Hillary Clinton standing on stage next to her counterpart, Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna, chastising Pakistan for not doing enough to stop terrorists operating within its borders, and not arresting the mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, Hafiz Saeed, who walks free in Pakistan despite a US price of \$10 million on his head.

Secretary Clinton's willingness to take this very public stand probably, *Via Meadia* suspects, sweetened the rest of Clinton's message: that India should do more to cut economic ties with Iran. Friends help friends.

The burgeoning relationship with India is one of the many pieces of the George W. Bush foreign policy agenda that continue to flourish in the Obama years. Under Bush, with Democratic support, the US accepted India's nuclear program (a shift that infuriates Pakistanis to this day). President Obama's first state dinner was in honor of India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. That Secretary Clinton went to both China and India on her tour of Asia is also the kind of signal that diplomats have no trouble reading: for the US, relations with Asia's two rising giants are part of an overall regional strategy.

After Secretary Clinton's most recent trip to Asia began tumultuously in China, where the Americans and Chinese managed to work together to avoid a crisis (though the Chen Guangcheng story develops day by day), Clinton moved to Bangladesh, where she promoted microfinancing and the role of women in development. From there it was on to the Indian state of West Bengal, where she met Chief Minister (Ms.) Mamata Banerjee to promote foreign investment in one of India's most important states, and then to New Delhi, where she stood on stage to drive home the close relationship between Washington and Asia's most powerful democracy.

The deepening US-India relationship is a key piece in a very elaborate program. Ever since President Obama announced a "pivot" to Asia and Secretary Clinton declared this to be "America's Pacific Century," Washington's Asia policy has been firing on all cylinders. Security treaties with the Philippines, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan and Australia have been expanded. Australia agreed to station US Marines in Darwin, and to consider plans to develop a base for unmanned drones on Australian territory deep in the Indian Ocean.

Japan's Prime Minister recently visited in Washington to discuss new forms of regional cooperation and the dispersal of thousands of American troops from bases in Japan to elsewhere in the Pacific. US forces have participated in war games with the Philippines and offered to mediate territorial disputes between China and its neighbors; American diplomats have arranged for Chinese human rights hero Chen Guangcheng to study in the United States, visited previously off-limits Myanmar, and built new partnerships with Indonesia, India, Malaysia and numerous other countries across Asia.

This is grand strategy in action and despite the inevitable partisan sniping it is likely that a Romney administration would mostly build on what the Obamans have done, just as the Obamans stand on the shoulders of Bush.

Although American foreign policy is already deep into its Asian century, American media coverage remains centered on the Atlantic. (At this moment this is partly because it is so hard to tear one's eyes away from the immense, slow motion train wreck taking place in the EU.) But Americans generally need to learn more about the new focus of our foreign policy; for one thing, they need to know just how deeply our military is engaged in the protection of the Asian security order. From Japan to Mongolia to Australia, American military personnel are present on bases run solely by the US or in collaboration with the host country, and military advisers are also attached to American diplomatic missions. Add those to the various island chains in the Pacific from Hawaii east to places like Guam and Samoa, and you can see a network of power and alliances that American presidents, secretaries of state and strategic thinkers have been working on since George Washington took the oath of office.

As Asia becomes more important in the world, America's links with and presence in Asia continue to grow. There will be ups and downs in our relations with particular Asian powers, but for those with eyes to see, the map below illustrates the way America's military commitments, its diplomatic objectives, its economic interests and its advocacy of democracy and human rights are propelling an ever-deeper engagement with the most important geopolitical theater of our time.

<http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/wrm/2012/05/08/asia-the-grand-design/>