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From: Hammer, Michael A
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To: Sullivan, Jacob J; Mills, Cheryl D
Cc: Toiv, Nora F; Laszczych, Joanne
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The FP piece is breaking through despite the intense press Iran focus this week. We are also working with EAP to aggressively push it in the region too. Spoke to Susan Glasser (FP)yesterday (when she came in for the econ roundtable) and she said it's been well received by their readers and getting considerable attention.

Clinton walks tightrope to forge new US role in Asia-Pacific

By Richard McGregor in Washington

In a city routinely gridlocked over how to cut spending, no one seemed to notice in Washington this week when Hillary Clinton proposed a vast expansion of US interests.

One of the most important tasks for the US over the next decade, she wrote in Foreign Policy magazine, "will be to lock in a substantially increased investment, diplomatic, economic, strategic and otherwise, in the Asia-Pacific".

On one level, the secretary of state's article was just a primer for November's crowded calendar in the region. Barack Obama will be in Bali for his first east Asian summit. He will also host the annual heads of state meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation forum in Hawaii, his birthplace. But Mrs Clinton's article was more than just diplomatic fluff. The winds of change have been blowing through US foreign policy for some years, along with the rise of China and India.

The Obama administration has, inevitably, been preoccupied with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the pursuit of al-Qaeda leaders into Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere.

But foreign policy officials, aligned with both parties, have patiently waited for a gap in the Middle East wars to refocus attention in Asia. Over the past year, with drawdowns in both wars, one is finally opening.

Barack Obama begins the third year of his presidency, with the House of Representatives under Republican control and the Tea Party movement ascendent

Kurt Campbell, US assistant secretary for east Asia and the Pacific, put the proposition more explicitly in August.

“One of the most important challenges for US foreign policy is to effect a transition from the immediate and vexing challenges of the Middle East to the long-term and deeply consequential issues in Asia,” he said.

Mitt Romney, the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination for 2012, hinted at much the same in his only significant foreign policy speech on Friday, promising to increase the building of naval vessels from nine a year to 15.

US power is disproportionately projected through command of the seas and shipping lanes in Asia and an expansion of the navy is a nod to strengthening an already powerful seaborne force. But refocusing on Asia is one thing; managing such a policy quite another.

Mrs Clinton has deftly taken advantage of China’s mis-steps in the South China Sea in the past two years. Rather than take on China over issues such as Tibet and Xinjiang, which is bound to provoke fury in Beijing without gaining much in return, the US has waltzed back into the region at the invitation of countries including Vietnam and the Philippines.

The Marxist-trained writers in the Chinese state media habitually blast the US as hegemonic. But Beijing’s own aggressive behaviour has allowed the US to act in a decidedly non-hegemonic fashion in Asia.

Hanoi and Manila have their own self-interested reason for wooing the US, to hedge against China. But if Mrs Clinton’s assertion of US interest in the South China Sea has helped them negotiate from a position of greater strength with Beijing, that is good all round.

News and comment from emerging economies, headed by Brazil, Russia, India and China

The greater challenges in Asia for the US lie elsewhere. The first is the budget at home, which threatens the ability of the US to conduct the foreign policy that the mantle of global leadership demands.

A bigger question is whether the US is returning to Asia to reassert its primacy in the region or whether it can share power with the Chinese.

Hugh White, an Australian strategist, has irritated some in Washington by saying that US insistence on maintaining primacy in Asia would amount to a “disastrous escalation” of tensions with Beijing, “because China is already, in terms of sheer economic weight, the most formidable strategic competitor America has ever faced”.

Mr White argues there is a third way in Asia: a collective regional leadership in which the US and China play equal roles.

Beijing’s leaders, of course, may be incapable of delivering such an arrangement, even if they thought it was a good idea. The idea remains a hard sell in Washington too.

But any new Asia-Pacific policy has to straddle a fundamental contradiction. US allies are growing more dependent on China economically while strengthening security ties with Washington. That does not seem like a policy for the ages.