

# India: Linchpin In U.S. Plans For Asia-Pacific NATO

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Indo-Russian ties: which way?

The visit of Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to India will give the two sides an opportunity to discuss recent strategic shifts in the Asia-Pacific region that may impact upon the Indo-Russian summit next month and bilateral ties in the longer term.

On his visit to New Delhi, he will finalise the political agenda of President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to India in the second half of December. In this context it is important for Moscow to find out what role India sees for itself in Washington's strategy of containment of China.

This strategy came to light when Obama visited India, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan earlier this month, even as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defence Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen paid visits to six other countries in the Asia-Pacific area — Cambodia, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga.

This is how Clinton summed up the message that the South Pacific visits sent: "What we are intent upon doing is not just demonstrating we're back by flying from capital to capital, but putting real meat on the bones of that position... Obviously, our military, in close cooperation with yours, is looking at how we can upgrade the presence of the United States in partnership with Australia and others," she said in an interview to an Australian daily.

During Clinton's visit to New Zealand, the US effectively revived the Cold War-era Pacific Security Pact, ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-US), which lapsed into a coma after New Zealand, in 1984, banned US nuclear powered warships from entering its harbours. The Wellington Declaration on a New Strategic Partnership between New Zealand and the US, which Clinton signed, paves the way for the full restoration of the tripartite defence pact.

Four days later, Gates, in Melbourne, announced the establishment of a new bilateral working group that, according to the Pentagon's American Forces Press Service, will be tasked with facilitating "greater US naval presence and port visits in the region."

US visitors also declared Washington resolve to expand its footprint in South-East Asia. Clinton called for beefing up US military presence in Singapore, which implies a firmer grip on the strategic Strait of Malacca, strengthening defence cooperation with Thailand and the Philippines in the fight against terrorism and natural disasters, and stepping up interaction with Vietnam.

Earlier this year the US decided to go through with \$6.5 billion worth of weapons sales to Taiwan, provoking strong protests from China.

During his visit to Japan, Obama assured his hosts that the US-Japan alliance is “the cornerstone of American strategic engagement in the Asia Pacific” and “the commitment of the United States to the defence of Japan is unshakable.” There is consensus in the Russian expert community that Obama’s visit to India was focused on winning support for Washington’s strategy of containing and encircling China. Most experts think that India is not willing to play the role of “a fulcrum of US anti-China policy,” as one analyst put it.

However, India’s reluctance to upset the US in the slightest way, displayed at the trilateral RIC meeting of Russian, Indian and Chinese foreign ministers in Wuhan, China, and which came on the heels of Obama’s visit to India, raised concerns that New Delhi may be cozying up to the US a little too far for Moscow’s comfort.

According to informed sources, Indian diplomats struck down a reference to “non-bloc” principles for building “an open transparent inclusive and balanced security and cooperation architecture in the Asia-Pacific region” in the Russian draft of the Wuhan communiqué.

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