

Clinton's Smart Power

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As she sailed through the first round of Senate confirmation hearings on Tuesday, America's top diplomat to be, Hillary Clinton, stuck to a formula that has been perfected by President Elect Barack Obama: speak in broad generalities and avoid being drawn into a discussion of specifics. Given the celebratory mood among the Democrats and the low political standing of the outgoing Bush administration and the Republicans, Clinton did not have to exert herself. All she did was to lavish praise on her peers in the Senate. Her soon to be ex-colleagues returned the favour in what looked like a group hug. Any one expecting a peek into Obama's foreign policy would, however, have to wait. For now Clinton simply repeated Obama's promise to emphasise diplomacy in the conduct of America's foreign relations. Implicit was the criticism of the Bush administration for focussing too heavily on the use of military force and acting unilaterally.

This did not mean, Obama and Clinton are about to push America to the left. Instead the message was that they will be more adept at combining America's hard and soft power resources. Clinton insisted that her emphasis will be on smart power'. "We must use what has been called smart power', the full range of tools at our disposal - diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal and cultural - picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation. With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of foreign policy." Clinton also declared that the age of an ideologically driven foreign policy under President Bush has come to a close. "The president-elect and I believe that foreign policy must be based on a marriage of principles and pragmatism, not rigid ideology. On facts and evidence, not emotion or prejudice." Silence on Kashmir There was no surprise in Clinton's identification of America's foreign policy priorities -of managing America's two current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. She stayed with Obama's emphasis on responsibly' ending the war in Iraq responsibly and devoting greater energies to winning' in Afghanistan. On the second issue, Clinton, avoided repeating what has now become Obama's standard formulation on seeking an integrated approach to Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Nor did Clinton mention Kashmir, as Obama does in all his references to the region. Clinton's silence on the presumed linkage between Pakistan's interests in Kashmir and Afghanistan does not mean the new administration has given up on this idea. It might only mean that the new secretary of state is conscious of India's strongly expressed concerns on the subject. Clinton promised to leverage all instruments at American command, "diplomacy, development, and defence to work with those in Afghanistan and Pakistan who want to root out al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other violent extremists who threaten them as well as us in what President Elect Obama has called the central front in the fight against terrorism." While few in America or the world disagree with Clinton's proposition, the devil as always is in the detail. In a few weeks, however, America's new approach to our north-western frontiers should emerge in greater detail if not clarity. CTBT and FMCT On the nuclear front, India will agree with some of Clinton's propositions while remaining wary of others. After Mumbai, New Delhi will have little difficulty in nodding at Clinton's assertion that "the gravest threat is the danger that weapons of mass destruction will fall into the hands of terrorists." Some in New Delhi might want to see this as a thinly veiled reference to Washington's growing concerns on Pakistan becoming a failed state and its nuclear arsenal falling into the hands of terrorists and extremists. Not every one in India, however, will be happy with the way Clinton extends her nuclear argument. "While defending against the threat of terrorism, we will also seize the parallel opportunity to get American back in the business of engaging other nations to reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons". Clinton added that she will work with the Senate on the "ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and reviving the negotiations on a

verifiable Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty." New Delhi must now brace up to a return of acronyms like the CTBT and FMCT, largely forgotten during the Bush years, to the centre of Indo-US relations and come up with some creative new Indian approaches to global nuclear arms control.