

VANITY FAIR

POLITICS

Woman of the World

In her ninth year as America's most admired woman, Hillary Clinton is dealing with radical change across the globe, as well as trying to transform U.S. diplomacy on the nuts-and-coffee level. But despite the secretary of state's punishing pace—half a million miles in her Boeing 757—and the complex relationship between her and President Obama, Clinton seems clear about what she can (and can't) accomplish, and, as Jonathan Alter reports, her friends are clear about something else: Madam Secretary is in her element.

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THE PERILS OF HILLARY As secretary of state, Hillary Clinton finds herself dealing with foreign upheaval not seen since the fall of the Soviet Union.

It was four a.m. when Hillary Clinton's plane touched down at Andrews Air Force Base, and by midmorning she was in the Oval Office conferring with President Obama. The night before, as

her plane was en route from Tunis, they had agreed that the vote of the United Nations Security Council to impose a no-fly zone on Libya meant that it was now decision time on launching a third American war in the Middle East, though no one in the U.S. government dared call it that. Muammar Qaddafi was ramping up his genocidal threats, pledging to show “no mercy” toward his own people (whom he described as “rats”) in the eastern city of Benghazi. Inside the White House, the president quickly settled on an American bombing campaign, but he and the secretary of state thought strongly that Great Britain and France should be seen as taking the lead. They agreed that there was no choice but for Hillary to sit down in person with both British prime minister David Cameron and French president Nicolas Sarkozy. “I’m sorry, Hillary, but you’re going to fly over the Atlantic again,” said Obama, who was about to leave on his own foreign trip, to Brazil. So only hours after landing from Tunis, she was headed back to Paris.

By then it was clear that the “Arab Spring” of 2011 was creating tumult not just in the Middle East but inside the Obama administration. Not since the fall of Communism, in the late 80s, has a U.S. administration faced a chain reaction of foreign crises that seemed so much out of its control.

At first, Hillary looked clairvoyant: in January, when the street protests were still small in Tunisia, she lectured decrepit dictatorial regimes at a conference in Qatar that “the region’s foundations are sinking into the sand.” Within days, demonstrators filled Cairo’s Tahrir Square, a vibrant plea for greater freedom that swiftly spread to Jordan, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Libya, and eventually even Syria.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

- [Hillary Clinton’s failed presidential bid \(Gail Sheehy, August 2008\)](#)
- [Bill Clinton’s impact on his wife’s career \(Todd Purdum, July 2008\)](#)
- [When the Obama era began \(Annie Leibovitz, March 2009\)](#)

But if Madam Secretary could be ahead of the curve, she was also sometimes behind it, caught in a dizzying series of upheavals that left her both exhilarated and exhausted. In early February, Hillary said the regime of Hosni Mubarak was “stable”; he was gone 17 days later. When she felt White House officials were pushing too hard in public statements for Mubarak to resign, Hillary

complained to President Obama, who was unmoved. Yet on the big picture, especially the need to isolate the menacing regime in Tehran, the president and his secretary of state fully agreed. They understood immediately that, for all the facile accusations of inconsistency and hypocrisy, a one-size-fits-all foreign policy wouldn't work. Doctrines, they felt, were for the doctrinaire.

Hillary had been one of the first in the administration to privately raise the issue of a no-fly zone. But she retreated when her main ally in the Cabinet, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, loudly and publicly said a no-fly zone would mean attacking ground positions, and it was a bad idea to get involved in Libya. The White House was searching for a way to arm the rebels—a strategy Hillary found problematic—but also resisted a no-fly zone. “Lots of people throw around phrases like no-fly zone. They talk about it as though it's just a video game,” White House chief of staff Bill Daley said dismissively.

Hillary decided to push her case on March 12, after the Arab League voted to request action from the U.N. Security Council—an extraordinary decision to break Arab ranks and ask the nations they had for so long denounced as colonialists to help. “Their statement moved her,” said a close aide, adding that two meanings of “moved” applied.

A myth quickly arose that the women in the administration—Clinton, U.N. ambassador Susan Rice, and national-security aide Samantha Power, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning book on genocide was influential in Obama's thinking—drove the debate. “The idea that the girls pushed the boys into war is ludicrous,” says Anne-Marie Slaughter, who until recently served as director of policy planning at State. “We were dismissed for months as soft liberals concerned about ‘peripheral’ development issues like women and girls, and now we're Amazonian Valkyrie warmongers. Please.” In truth, the president, as usual, was not persuaded by anyone to change his mind. He was always a reluctant warrior and decided to intervene only when imminent atrocities in Benghazi made sitting on his hands even riskier.

What the women policymakers did do was help mobilize the alliance. Rice worked hard for the broadest possible language in U.N. Resolution 1973, to allow maximum allied flexibility, while Hillary made sure that China and Russia abstained instead of vetoing the resolution.

Hillary already spends much of her life on her plane, but for six crucial days in March she might just as well have used her seat belt as a fashion accessory, flying nearly 20,000 miles on the Washington-Paris-Cairo-Tunis-Washington-Paris-Washington route. On March 14 and 15, she met with Nicolas Sarkozy. The French president was gung-ho to attack Qaddafi, who by then was reversing rebel advances and regaining the offensive. After taking the measure of

Mahmoud Jibril, recognized as one of the leaders of Libya's transitional government, Hillary agreed to U.S. intervention if the U.N. backed it. Viewing television images of the dictator's brutality from her quarters at the U.S. ambassador's residence strengthened her resolve. She took to seconding her husband's much-repeated line that the biggest mistake of his presidency was doing nothing to prevent genocide in Rwanda.

Hillary's personal connection to Sarkozy helped cement the coalition. In 2010, Sarkozy had gallantly steadied her after a shoe had come off her foot as she climbed the stone steps of the Élysée Palace. ("I may not be Cinderella but you're certainly my Prince Charming!" Hillary inscribed a photo, which sits in his office.) Now, over mixed fruit and chocolate, the French president took the normal diplomatic flattery a step further in their "bilat" (diplo-speak for bilateral talks). "Hillary, I always like being with you," he told her. "You are tough. You are smart. You are a good person."

From Paris, on the 15th, she went with some trepidation to Cairo, where many young protesters still angry about her support for Mubarak refused to meet with her. Others vented to her face in a Four Seasons conference room before the mood changed and they talked about democracy building. Her 10 to 15 minutes in Tahrir Square the next day (where she was greeted cordially) and drop-by in Tunisia on March 17 left her small security detail jittery; the local authorities, her guards felt, had no clue what they were doing. She arrived back in Washington early on March 18 before heading across the Atlantic again. She arrived in Paris at six a.m. on March 19 and set to work rounding up support from other allies.

The rollout of the "kinetic military action" (the ridiculous euphemism used to avoid the word "war") was botched and misleading. Hillary had little warning before Sarkozy announced that French planes were in the skies over Libya. At her Paris press conference she made it seem, with her frequent references to "they" and "them"—with the U.S. providing "assistance"—that someone else was leading the intervention. Hillary was safely on her plane en route back to Washington on the evening of March 19 when the world would learn that the core of the attack—112 cruise missiles directed at Libyan targets—was largely American. It would be another 10 days before she would go to London to arrange for the military campaign to be handled by nato. Whatever the burden-sharing logistics, the United States was in deep now, on a course that no one could predict.

Madam Secretary

For Barack Obama, the Arab Spring and its aftermath will shape just one critical piece of his

record. But, for Hillary Clinton, the swirling challenges of the region are likely to determine her legacy. Many diplomats remain anxious; the world they knew has been upended. Yet they also understand that the months ahead will be Hillary's moment to help turn those ripples into a permanent tide of reform and renewal.

But Hillary's intense diplomatic efforts to forge a coalition to go to war in Libya came at the exact worst time, only two months after WikiLeaks, the whistle-blowing Web site run by Julian Assange, began posting thousands of classified State Department cables online. Candid descriptions of foreign leaders (e.g., Putin is the "alpha dog" of a "virtual mafia state") were published around the world and have already led to the departure of U.S. ambassadors in Mexico and Ecuador, with more fallout on the way. Hillary told staff that she could not fathom how an army private, Bradley Manning, with psychological problems and a drag-queen boyfriend could single-handedly cause the United States unprecedented embarrassment just by labeling massive downloads as Lady Gaga songs.

Several allies needed little comfort. "Don't worry about it," one leader told Hillary. "You should see what we say about you." Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi wasn't so forgiving. In 2008 the loutish media baron and billionaire had described Barack Obama as "young, handsome and bronzato (bronzed)," but after WikiLeaks he chose to play the victim. It wasn't clear whether he was genuinely upset about a cable describing him as "physically and politically weak" or merely projecting his anger over allegations in the Italian press about his relationship with a teenage Moroccan belly dancer suspected of prostitution. Either way, he unloaded on Hillary during an awkward one-on-one in Astana, Kazakhstan.

According to a firsthand account I heard an hour afterward in a hallway near the conference room, Berlusconi told Hillary, "The press is all over me. They think the U.S. is saying that I'm vain and stay out all night. I'm tired, Hillary, very tired. I had such a good relationship with 'Beel,' 'George,' and 'Barack'—how can they say this about me?" Hillary explained that, as Berlusconi knew perfectly well, the cables were written by mostly lower-level people. "Look, Silvio, you and I have been friends for 15 years. I've been there. Nobody has had more things alleged—true or untrue—than me." Mostly she let him vent. Her background as a politician and long history with Berlusconi and others wounded by the cables helped ease the tensions.

Even as she navigates these choppy waters, Hillary's own vessel is solid and surprisingly leakproof. One of the least-noticed changes in American public life is how she has been transformed from a subject of constant gossip and calumny into a figure of consequence and

little controversy. There are structural reasons: secretaries of state always exist in a zone slightly above grubby politics, which is meant—in theory, at least—to stop at the water’s edge. The right-wing attack machine can apparently concentrate only on one or two villains at a time, and since 2008 it has been Obama’s and Nancy Pelosi’s turn in the barrel, not Hillary’s. I tried for months to find people willing to lace into her. None would, not even politicians and TV blowhards who had once catalogued her distortions and dined out on despising her.

Hillary Clinton is now in her ninth straight year as the Gallup poll’s “America’s Most Admired Woman,” but being a great secretary of state requires more than energy, brains, and celebrity. Dean Acheson helped rebuild Europe after World War II. Henry Kissinger, who acted like the secretary of state for Richard Nixon even before he got the job, engineered the opening to China. But does anyone think Colin Powell left State with a better reputation than he had before becoming secretary? Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice broke the gender barrier and were competent enough, but left no historic imprint. The State Department isn’t called “Foggy Bottom” for nothing.

For any secretary of state, the prerequisite for success is a strong relationship with the president. “He’s hard for her to connect with,” admits one of her top people. “It’s hard for her to break through to the more-than-polite level.” That isn’t meant to suggest chilliness or dysfunction. “Is it Bush-Baker?” the aide continues, referring to the relationship between the first President Bush and James Baker, who was so tight with his boss that he felt obliged to resign as secretary of state to run Bush’s ill-fated re-election campaign in 1992. “No. But there’s a lot of mutual respect, and she feels like she’s always got a shot with him.” Imagine how it feels to be a supplicant, looking for her “shot” at impressing the president. It was only four years ago that Hillary said her main opponent in the Democratic primaries was “irresponsible and frankly naïve” when he promised to meet with the leaders of Iran, North Korea, and other rogue regimes without preconditions during his first year in office. She hasn’t forgotten who turned out to be right on that one.

One day I asked Hillary point-blank how she gets along with Obama, with whom she meets a few times a week when neither is on the road. She gave me a predictable answer, that her relationship is “not only very good professionally but very warm personally.” Of course, “warm” is just another term of art in Washington, where the advice to anyone looking for a friend has long been to get a dog. When I ask for examples, she has to pause before recalling a very public moment: a spring day in 2009 when the weather was so good that the president suggested they go outside, where they were photographed chatting at a picnic table on the South Lawn. “It was

exactly what I could have hoped for. It was spontaneous and heartfelt, and we had a good time,” she says. Her second example is a full hug she and the president shared in the Situation Room after the health-care bill finally passed.

She accepted the post, in November of 2008, only after President-Elect Obama—in an inspired move over the objections of many on his campaign staff—twisted not just her arm, she informed friends, but her fingers, toes, and every other bone in her body. The president, for his part, is proud of himself for choosing her. He knows that she represents the United States better than anyone but him and is—to the surprise of many Obama veterans—refreshingly low-maintenance. When budget season arrived this year and the departments all faced drastic cuts, Hillary used a Cabinet meeting to offer tips on how to avoid making cuts that would affect vulnerable people—children, the elderly—and look bad politically. (She recalled that Newt Gingrich’s effort to slash the school-lunch program, which put Gingrich on the defensive, was the real turning point in the 1995 budget debate.) Several second-tier Cabinet members thought it one of the most useful White House meetings they had ever attended.

I’ve interviewed Hillary numerous times since she was First Lady of Arkansas, and it’s usually frustrating. She’s terrific off the record: blunt, ironic, and incisive about people, including her husband. When she cuts to the nub of something and laughs infectiously, you can see why her friends consider her such good company. On the record is tougher, especially when she’s in a job where a single misplaced word can turn into an international incident. It’s not that she doesn’t trust at least some reporters; otherwise she wouldn’t risk private candor. But the distrust for the news media as a species—the sense of being burned and burned again—long ago made her wary and sometimes defensive.

Up, Up, and Away

As secretary of state, Hillary Clinton has flown more than half a million miles to 80 countries in her two and a half years on the job. Her plane looks like Air Force One on the outside, but isn’t as grand on the inside. It’s one of four Boeing 757s that the military fitted with 15 ordinary coach seats for reporters in the rear, a business-class staff workspace with tables in the middle that seats about 25, and Clinton’s quarters up front near an area jammed with communications gear. She spends most of her time in a small private room with a desk, a modest pullout sofa bed, and a flat-screen for secure videoconferencing. The intimacy of the quarters intensified an already awkward trip at the end of February when Samantha Power, who had been forced to resign from the Obama campaign in 2008 after calling Hillary a “monster,” traveled with the

secretary of state to a U.N. Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva. Some months before he died, Richard Holbrooke, the legendary special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, had brokered peace between them, but now no one knew what would happen en route. “It was uncomfortable, but everyone was extremely professional,” said one official aboard.

For most of her thousands of hours in the air, Hillary changes out of her trademark pantsuit (yellow is her favorite color for clothes and in the décor of her homes) into a fleece top and sweats. Meals consist largely of fruit and vegetables (she has a special taste for hot peppers) and maybe a scotch or Bloody Mary. “Don’t bring me the dessert!” she loudly tells the flight attendants only moments before sauntering into the staff cabin, brownie already in hand: “I know—I’ve been bad.” Occasional cupcakes with candles are also exempt because Hillary is religious about observing staff birthdays. She resists movies (despite a weakness for anything with Meryl Streep, especially *Out of Africa*), reads yet more briefing papers than she’s already consumed in Washington, scans news on an iPad, and sometimes manages a few pages of a mystery, but mostly she sleeps, without any pills, often right through landing. “If she couldn’t sleep most of the way,” says Philippe Reines, her longtime press secretary, “she wouldn’t be able to function.”

Some of her best road stories involve Holbrooke, her close friend, a maestro of diplomacy for more than four decades. (Holbrooke was meeting with Hillary in her office last December when he collapsed and was rushed to the hospital, where he later died from a ruptured aorta.) At his Kennedy Center memorial service, which played more like a roast, she recalled that Holbrooke was once, in Pakistan, so insistent on making a point that he followed her all the way into the ladies’ room. On boarding her plane, he would test every seat to see which was the most comfortable, then hound whichever official was assigned to it to trade with him. Hillary especially enjoyed when he would disappear into the airplane restroom and emerge like an oversize Easter bunny in his bright-yellow sleeping suit. “On hearing Winston Churchill’s motto, ‘Never, never, never, never give up,’ [Richard] called Churchill halfhearted,” she said. Hillary thinks this also perfectly captures her own theory of persistence.

Aloft, the secretary of state can often be found with a black binder clip in her hair instead of fastened onto classified documents. It helps. Her stylist, Isabelle Goetz, does her hair in Washington, but on the road—unless the ambassador’s wife can recommend someone good—she takes care of herself. For years she’s routinely done her own makeup, which is easier because she has good skin. And her genes seem unusually strong. Dorothy Rodham, Hillary’s mother, is 92 but looks more like 80. Hillary is 63 but seems a bit younger. She is one of those

lucky people who look better—or at least not worse—with age.

All of this is relevant politically because it means that in 2016, when she's 68, she is unlikely to be written off as too old to run for president. Since the beginning of the year, Hillary has said repeatedly that she will leave office no later than early 2013 and retire from public life. In Bahrain, just before the Middle East upheaval, I heard her be more direct than ever before on the subject: "I've had a fascinating and rewarding public career I think I will serve as secretary of state as my last public position and then I'll probably go back to advocacy work, particularly on behalf of women and children, and probably around the world."

Hillary isn't as calculating as her public image. The 2000 Senate race, for instance, was practically serendipitous. But it's hard to believe "Clinton" and "ambition" have been fully sundered. In 2016, the Democrats are unlikely to have anyone better or more acceptable to different parts of the party. The nearer-term options are far-fetched. When Bob Woodward said on CNN last fall that Hillary's switching jobs with Joe Biden was "on the table," the reaction inside both the White House and State Department was to scoff. Neither has an incentive to switch. With the Iraq portfolio already in his pocket, Biden gets plenty of foreign-policy action. His bigger concern is staying on good terms with Hillary. In late 2009, he worried that their long and friendly relationship was in jeopardy over Af-Pak policy. He wanted few troops and heavy reliance on Predator drones; she wanted an open-ended, hugely expensive counter-insurgency commitment. The president ended up sending many more troops than Biden wanted—a total commitment of 100,000—but with withdrawal deadlines beginning this year that Clinton, siding with the Pentagon, opposed. To ease the tensions, Biden and Hillary stepped up their breakfasts and lunches where they call each other "dear."

Uncommon Ground

Hillary has often said that this is the hardest job she's ever had. It's not just the constant travel but also the speed and range of the issues she must master. She finds being secretary of state even more taxing than the 2008 campaign, where she could go on autopilot and give the same speech six times in a day, and had heard all the questions before. "With each month there's more wear and tear," says Jake Sullivan, a young lawyer and former Rhodes scholar, who has emerged as one of her closest advisers. "But she also gets more energized and comfortable." A half-dozen of her friends agree that they have never seen her more in her element. "She seems engaged, happy, focused, determined, and very tired from all the travel," observes Tom Vilsack, an early supporter from his days as governor of Iowa, who is now the secretary of agriculture. "I

can't remember her ever working this much," says Dr. Irwin Redlener, who has advised her for many years on children's issues.

Despite running against each other, the president and secretary of state have a lot in common in the way their minds work—more, arguably, than either has in common with Bill Clinton. Staffers have noticed that both Obama and Hillary are methodical, secure, and human-scale when you talk to them; they're deductive thinkers who drill down into a problem. The former president, by contrast, is discursive, needy, and larger-than-life; he's an inductive thinker with a connective mind.

Of course, the sense of order and discipline that Obama and Hillary share belies significant differences that may yet re-emerge. Hillary long ago instructed staffers not to look back to the bitter 2008 primaries or criticize Obama, and for the most part they don't. But late at night, when they're safely distant from "the seventh floor" (the mahogany-lined part of the State Department where Hillary and the other power players work), aides complain that Hillary's creative ideas are often stymied by an inexperienced White House that doesn't understand the role of drama and stagecraft in diplomacy. They say that Hillary is the daring, decisive risktaker, while the president is hampered by slow reflexes and an overly cautious and unimaginative approach. Not surprisingly, Obama hands insist this is wrong. The only significant policy difference between the two principals, they note, was over Afghanistan, where the president's policy hardly lacked boldness. On Egypt, it was Hillary who early on recommended caution and Obama who insisted that U.S. policy should be to push for an immediate transition. And they offer a domestic example for good measure: had Hillary been president, she would likely have sided with Rahm Emanuel and compromised much earlier on health-care reform, which would have meant a less ambitious bill.

Where the risktaking point might apply is in critical personnel decisions. Hillary likes the challenge of handling big, talented, difficult individuals; it's what attracted her not just to Bill but also to advisers like Richard Holbrooke. Obama (through then national-security adviser Jim Jones) almost fired Holbrooke. Although Hillary told the White House about her own exasperation with Holbrooke (a position she didn't advertise after his death), Obama's treatment of the envoy rankled both Clintons. "I never could understand people who didn't appreciate him," Bill Clinton said in his eulogy at Holbrooke's Kennedy Center memorial service. This was a not-so-veiled shot at people like Obama, who was sitting onstage nearby—the president's no-drama impatience with certain protean characters extends to his strained relationship with the former president. Hillary is caught in the middle, but doesn't

appear to be making efforts to bring the two most important men in her life closer.

Even so, she works hard to keep the hatchet with Obama buried. This requires staying on good terms with his White House. Hillary has known Tom Donilon, the national-security adviser, since 1978, when he was a 23-year-old political operative. They have lunch once a week, where sometimes—as on the details of Af-Pak escalation—they cordially disagree but know the president will decide anyway. Donilon believes you have to go back to George H. W. Bush's era to find such “alignment” among national-security principals. “She’s a great team player,” he says.

The biggest problem between State and the White House used to be that Cheryl Mills, Hillary’s chief of staff, clashed with Denis McDonough, the deputy national-security adviser, who is close personally to the president. Now the two remind staffers of an old married couple that quarrel harmlessly. A more significant source of tension is that Hillary has long wanted the president to do more outreach to heads of state. If she had her way, the White House would have held three times as many state dinners and bilateral meetings with foreign leaders in the last two years. That might have helped with all the fence-mending and coalition-building to come.

Smart Power

Being secretary of state isn’t as much fun as it sounds. Imagine having to spend your days saying things like “We must also renew our efforts toward a settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh based on basic principles elaborated under the auspices of the Minsk Group.” That’s Hillary’s life.

Once she accepted the post, she consulted all the living secretaries of state and lots of experts on what she could get done at Foggy Bottom. I ask her what they advised, hoping to get a little closer to how she defines success. “They told me, ‘You can either concentrate on a few big issues that will really make your mark, like China policy, or you can try to better manage the State Department and USAID’”—the United States Agency for International Development, the department’s famously dysfunctional development arm that administers civilian foreign aid—“so that everything that’s done is more in line with what you’re trying to achieve over time,” she recalls. “And I said, ‘I don’t know how you do one without the other.’”

Hillary has already had some successes, most conspicuously her use of American diplomatic leverage in the U.N. Security Council to get China and especially Russia to help isolate Iran and North Korea. She and the president have convinced the Russians that proffering military

hardware to Iran isn't in their national-security interest—a tough sell. And ever since Obama bollixed up his relations with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in 2010, Hillary has worked overtime to soothe Bibi. “She’s indispensable—the only one trusted on all sides [of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict],” says Sandy Berger, who served as Bill Clinton’s National Security Council adviser.

Most conspicuously, Hillary has championed what has come to be known as “civil society.” In practice that means moving beyond the usual contacts between the United States and foreign governments to forge ties with the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are essential to stability and development. Like her husband, she’s deployed her international stature for “convening power,” bringing together governments and NGOs on a dizzying array of significant projects that would otherwise lack support.

Always a generalist, Hillary thinks concentrating too much on one area is hazardous. “We’ve got a big world out there, and [if] you ignore some part of it, it comes back to bite you,” she tells me. So she has tried to strike a balance between hot spots and the more mundane management decisions that she thinks are necessary to elevate diplomacy and development to the level of defense. That way, the United States would have a more sophisticated, “3-D” foreign policy, looking short-term and long-term, top-down and people-up. Hillary herself shies away from the Cineplex imagery in favor of the notion of “smart power.”

“‘Smart power’ is the use of American power in ways that would help prevent and resolve conflict—not just send our military in,” she says. “‘Smart power’ is closer cooperation between our development experts, our diplomats, our military leaders.” Hillary offers an example: in Afghanistan, the Pentagon has a fund that allows a young American officer to take \$100,000 in discretionary funds and rebuild a school on his own authority. By contrast, a diplomat or development expert trying to rebuild a school would spend months filling out forms, Hillary says, and probably still wouldn’t get the money out of Congress. “We need a more agile civilian power,” she concludes.

Hillary draws a distinction between focusing on relations with governments (the locus of diplomacy for hundreds of years) and stimulating change in societies, where the results are less controllable but ultimately more profound. She clearly wants to try both at once, but that intention can break down under the stress of a crisis. In the debate over the bombing of Libya, the “society” policymakers were the hawks. Their argument was caricatured by critics as purely humanitarian but was in fact strategic. The thinking here was that the U.S. must “get on the

right side of history” and connect to the aspirations of young people in the region. By contrast, the Old Guard focused on nervous allies like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Jordan. Seeing the upheaval through the lens of stability, they were doves on the question of bombing Libya, which they thought might detract from the larger aim of containing Iran. Their mantra was “Beware unintended consequences.”

While the Pentagon was clearly opposed beforehand, the other power centers in the government were more conflicted. It wasn't State versus White House, much less women versus men or old versus young. And this is true moving forward. Some men in the White House are on the “society” side; some women in the State Department are on the “government to government” side. And many officials switch sides (and can switch back again) amid the long hours of debate. The most common sentiment among foreign-policy veterans reflects another familiar Bill Clinton line: “It sure was simpler during the Cold War.”

For Hillary, the crisis mentality must eventually give way to the more mundane realities of running the department. She is midway through a five-year plan to increase the size of the State Department's foreign-service staff by 25 percent and double USAID. And she's taken a leaf from the Pentagon playbook and launched a “Q.D.D.R.”—Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. The idea is to ask all the agencies housed at Foggy Bottom the larger questions—like whether they are even focused on the right things. It's a huge structural project.

Hillary prides herself on sweating the small stuff, too. She's big on feedback—an intranet “Secretary's Sounding Board” is bringing the suggestion box into the modern age. She gets high marks from the high-tech community for “21st-century statecraft” like using texting to raise money for Haiti-earthquake victims and an Internet freedom agenda she is pushing aggressively. She's popular with State Department employees for practical changes like providing full benefits for same-sex partners (“Fix it!” she scolded bureaucrats who were dragging their feet) and building showers to accommodate people who cycle or run to work. In the past, meetings with foreign ministers featured nothing more than bottled water. Hillary was incredulous: “You can get coffee, tea, nuts all over the world, and in Washington you get a bottle of water?” She was told, “That's the way we do it here.” Her chilly retort: “Not anymore.”

The secretary runs a brisk, no-nonsense meeting. “We present and she interrogates, in the best sense of the word,” says Patrick Kennedy, the undersecretary for management. Received wisdom gets eviscerated. “Jeff, you've got to do better than that,” she told Jeffrey Feltman, the assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, one day when he presented a shopworn idea. With

USAID undergoing an overhaul, she listens to every reform report, down to the details of how chlorine tablets for clean drinking water can be transported by truck in Honduras. “She’s looking at the guts of how we work,” says Dr. Raj Shah, who runs USAID.

According to old State hands, Hillary represents some of the better qualities of her predecessors. She has Baker’s obsession with preparation, reaches out like Colin Powell (who advised her to resist the efforts of bureaucrats to strip her of her BlackBerry), and offers continuity with Condi Rice’s policy on aids and Africa. But she might most resemble Ronald Reagan’s second secretary of state, George Shultz, a canny pragmatist who made significant progress in several areas without being associated with a single momentous event. Shultz was known for valuing the “career people” (foreign-service officers) and casting a wide net for advice. Hillary does that, too, though she’s still surrounded by a Praetorian Guard of loyalists from her Senate office who are too political for the taste of some diplomats in the building. (They preferred the military veterans around Powell or academics around Rice.) Her great weakness over the years was too often choosing subordinates based more on loyalty than competence. She has been better about this since moving to State, but still slow to extend her trust.

When she travels, Hillary manages to be simultaneously remote from the media (joint press conferences with foreign ministers are limited to two questions for each) and accessible to the public. Unless a crisis obliterates her schedule, she routinely subjects herself to what Reines infelicitously calls “townterviews,” a combination of university town meeting and television interview featuring a group of effusive local journalists, students, and faculty. The format allows her to promote civil society and human rights without getting in the face of the country’s leaders. Often a questioner will refer to her in fractured English as “President Clinton.” In Asia, this can be especially mortifying for the shy audience. She’ll cheerfully reply “I wish!” or “Almost!” to disarm the situation, before going on to explain how her serving in the government of the man who defeated her is a sign of democracy’s strength. Almost every trip includes meeting with leading women from local NGOs, many of whom line up to tell Hillary with what little English they can muster how inspirational she has been to their efforts. “She has almost singular recall from years back,” says Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs, who recounts being amazed at what she remembered about a group of Chinese women from a path-breaking trip in 1995. “Not just names, but obscure details about people she’s met only once and hadn’t been briefed on.”

State of the Union

No one abroad seems interested in a subject that continues to fascinate Americans—the state of the Clintons’ marriage. The truth, at present, is hardly momentous. “They’ve been in good shape as a couple for way longer than people realize,” says one friend in a position to know. “When things are not good, they’re not good at hiding it.” Wherever Bill’s behavior took the relationship, the friend continues, there remains “a profound level of forgiveness and attachment between them.” Despite heart problems, Bill is in good health, but his weight loss—thanks to a vegetarian diet—has left him looking shrunken in person. The rumors of straying have subsided.

Aides to both claim, implausibly, that the Clintons talk on the phone every day. The former president doesn’t use e-mail (Hillary, by contrast, is a BlackBerry fiend), which makes it hard to be in constant touch.

Chappaqua remains a place for them to spend time together. On weekends, when both are off the road, she often takes the shuttle up from Washington—no government plane—on Friday night and returns to her house on Whitehaven Street in Northwest Washington on Sunday night. They’ll take long walks with their dog Seamus, a chocolate Labrador and the great-nephew of their White House dog, Buddy, who was struck by a car and killed in Chappaqua in 2002. Sometimes they go house-hunting in suburban New York for fun, which leads to unfounded rumors they are about to move. Frequent guests include close staff and old friends like Terry McAuliffe and investors Alan Patricof and Marc Lasry and their families.

Only a few staffers were invited to Chelsea’s wedding, last July in Rhinebeck, New York, including the tiny village of women around Hillary who helped raise her: Maggie Williams, Melanne Verveer, Cheryl Mills, Capricia Marshall (now head of protocol for the government), and Huma Abedin, Hillary’s indispensable “body woman” and surrogate daughter, whose marriage to New York congressman Anthony Weiner the same month as Chelsea’s nuptials made Hillary feel as if she had two weddings in the family at the same time. “Her best friends are work and Chelsea, and now Marc,” a close family associate says, referring to Marc Mezvinsky, Chelsea’s new husband. Shortly before the wedding ceremony began, Bill, Hillary, Chelsea, and Marc went into a room together at the Astor Courts estate for a few minutes with no one else, not even Mezvinsky’s (divorced) parents. “They were three and now they’re four,” one friend says. (Contrary to rumors, Hillary’s aides say that Chelsea’s marriage is going well.)

Never, Never, Never, Never Give Up

When a young man at a town-hall meeting in Kyrgyzstan asks Hillary which designers she

wears, she answers immediately: “Would you ever ask a man that question?” The crowd of young people laughed and applauded. Hillary and Bill like to vacation at Oscar de la Renta’s Punta Cana resort, in the Dominican Republic, but she wasn’t about to mention that, or venture that Vera Wang designed Chelsea’s wedding dress. Like Albright and Rice, Hillary wants women’s issues to be substantive. “All the young men on our staff don’t seem to think they’re important,” Hillary remarked archly one day in 2009, an early sign of the schisms to come. To reinforce the message she named Verveer, her former chief of staff in the White House, to be the first ambassador-at-large for global women’s issues. Even amid the *Sturm und Drang* of the Middle East and North Africa, she’s liable to leave her imprint in the same areas that brought her into public life in the first place—helping women and children and strengthening civil society. It’s a straight line from the Children’s Defense Fund, where she worked as a young law-school graduate, to Foggy Bottom. From micro-credit to food assistance to education, Hillary knows that women in underdeveloped villages usually spend aid money on their families, while men more often spend it on themselves, which is a polite way of saying on liquor and prostitutes.

Seemingly minor changes can yield huge benefits. “As we meet ... as many as three billion people are gathering around open fires or old and inefficient stoves in small kitchens in poorly ventilated houses,” Hillary tells a New York philanthropic audience. “As the women cook, smoke fills their lungs and toxins begin poisoning them and their children,” she explains before noting that the World Health Organization estimates that nearly two million people a year—half of them children—die from pneumonia and other ailments that are likely connected to this problem, more than twice the number of deaths from malaria. She has been involved in this cause for years, but now has a much bigger platform to push the idea of new cookstoves that cost as little as \$25 each. “This could be as transformative as bed nets or even vaccines,” she says, the excitement in her voice palpable. “We are excited because we think this is actually a problem we can solve.”

That’s rare. Development challenges and global conflicts often seem intractable, and that has to be a little discouraging at three in the morning in the skies over Kabul or Cairo. “You can’t just look at these conflicts and issues and say, ‘O.K., that’s been solved,’” Hillary says to me at the end of an interview, starting to chuckle. “Because most of these problems are never solved.” Now she’s back in dutiful, dogged mode, which happens to be the mode that best fits today’s Hillary—the one almost everyone seems to like. “You know,” she says, “you just keep working at them and working at them and working at them.” Who can argue with that?

Keywords

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