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**From:** Anne-Marie Slaughter [REDACTED]  
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## Challenges From Iran to North Korea Spotlight Old Threats

By Indira A.R. Lakshmanan and John Walcott - Apr 12, 2012 8:30 PM ET Fri Apr 13 00:30:00 GMT 2012

For a decade, the world's attention has been drawn to what U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calls "new actors" on the international stage. This week, world leaders have been preoccupied by a problem as old as geopolitics: bad actors.

The U.S. and its allies failed to dissuade North Korea from testing a long-range rocket, and are struggling to keep Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and Syria from killing its own people to quell dissent.

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"The old world and the new world coexist," said Anne-Marie Slaughter, Clinton's former policy planning chief. "For all the emphasis on the new world, no one should forget it's on top of, not instead of, old problems."

In daily meetings at the State Department, Slaughter said she spent half the time on immediate crises and half on emerging transnational threats to global stability, such as food security and climate change. Many of the crises are throwbacks to "Kissinger's world," she said, referring to President Richard Nixon's secretary of state Henry Kissinger.

The latest flurry of diplomacy and pressure to rein in Iran, North Korea and Syria -- countries that have repeatedly challenged global norms over the last three decades -- also underscores that there are limited alternatives to address the age-old problem of rogue nations.

“It’s really hard to address these issues decisively when you’ve only got diplomatic and economic tools, particularly when the nuclear card is in play,” Slaughter, a professor at Princeton University, said in an interview. “You’re applying a lot of pressure to an entity that, in the end, is able to hunker down and say ‘no.’ If you’re not going to address it militarily, what else can you do?”

### Policeman of the World

Slaughter and other supporters of the administration’s foreign policy give President Barack Obama credit for building multilateral coalitions to pressure Iran, North Korea and Syria through negotiations and sanctions, rather than taking unilateral military action.

“The U.S. is no longer accepted as the policeman of the world and to try to be one is counterproductive,” said Zbigniew Brzezinski, who served as national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter. Multinational pressure on rogue states is essential, he said, even if getting to a solution that way may be gradual, painful and slow.

“Without large-scale international consensus, efforts by the United States are going to make things worse,” Brzezinski said in an interview. “Before plunging headfirst into Syria or giving a green light to Israel to attack Iran, we have to think through what are the likely consequences of dealing with problems of past in a manner reminiscent of the past.”

### ‘Geometry’ of Power

Speaking this week at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, Clinton said that “while the geometry of global power may have changed, American leadership is as essential as ever.”

Clinton consistently has advocated multilateral diplomacy as the solution to both old and new problems.

The U.S. “must reflect the world as it is, not as it used to be. It does not make sense to adapt a 19th century concert of powers or a 20th century balance of power strategy. We cannot go back to Cold War containment or to unilateralism,” she said in a July 2009 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington.

In the same speech, she stressed the need to “multi-task” to address traditional and 21st century threats. “We have to deal with the urgent, the important, and the long-term all at once,” Clinton said.

### ‘Witches Brew’

After the end of the Cold War, some foreign policy pundits popularized the idea that new transnational threats -- extremist ideologies and terrorism, battles over natural resources, climate change, food security, pandemics -- had supplanted traditional geopolitical conflicts.

“The way we talked about these problems in the ‘90s was that a witches’ brew of civil war, state weakness, genocide, disease, refugees and spillover effects would metastasize into some kind of contagion that could really affect global stability,” recalled Michael O’Hanlon, a scholar at the Brookings Institution in Washington and co-author of “Bending History: Barack Obama’s Foreign Policy.”

This week’s trio of crises are a “stark reminder that some traditional threats remain,” O’Hanlon said. “We’re still half in Machiavelli’s world, but half in the world” of dangerous hackers, terrorists and melting icecaps.

Obama deserves credit for “dealing with the inbox as it arrived,” O’Hanlon said. “He prioritized and handled the classic threats, as well as the 21st century threats he couldn’t ignore: namely terrorism.”

### Emerging Threats

Walter Russell Mead, a professor at Bard College in upstate New York, said some so-called emerging threats, such as the imminent threat of a war over water, may have been “overblown.” Meanwhile, trying to rein in Iran’s suspected ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons capability and dissuade North Korea from missile and nuclear development is a challenge that “presidents going back to George H.W. Bush have been trying to address without a lot of success.”

There are “transnational forces out there, but states remain very important,” said Eliot Cohen, who was chief foreign policy adviser to Condoleezza Rice when she was President George W. Bush’s secretary of state. “We’re not as far from the world of Clausewitz as some pundits would like to think,” he said in an interview, referring to the 19th century German military theorist Carl von Clausewitz.

While some academics and columnists promoted the notion that traditional interstate rivalries were obsolete, policy makers always understood that “these problems are still very much with us,” said Cohen, now a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington.

### Many Problems at Once

“The challenge for American foreign policy is you have many different problems at once -- al Qaeda, the radical Islamist threat, the generic problem of ungoverned states,” as well as problem nations such as North Korea and Iran, and big powers such as China and Russia “that aren’t necessarily well disposed to the U.S.,” he said.

Brian Katulis, a fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington, said the last decade also demonstrated the flaws in some strategies promoted to address emerging crises.

“From 2007 ‘till 2011, we had a fixation with counterinsurgency strategy, when it was quite clear it delivered mixed results in Iraq and Afghanistan,” he said. “It was very costly for U.S. taxpayers and has not produced sustainable results.”

Slaughter noted that new threats, such as nuclear proliferation, and old threats, such as rogue states, intersect in ways that make them very difficult to address. North Korea has sold nuclear technology and been involved in transnational criminal networks, while Iran has supported terrorism and proliferated weapons.

With Iran, North Korea and Syria this week, the attention is on “traditional chessboard geopolitics: they move, we move, and what do we have that can try to force them to change their behavior,” she said. “Kissinger’s world is still there.”

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