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Newsweek: The Hillary Doctrine

By Gayle Tzemach Lemmon
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In a time of momentous change in the world, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton sets out on her most heartfelt mission: to put women and girls at the forefront of the new world order.

Hillary Clinton seemed to be in a rare moment of repose while the Middle East erupted. She'd just returned from a surprise trip to Yemen and now sat for 30 minutes against a blue backdrop in the State Department's Washington broadcast studio as reports streamed in of Libya's violent crackdown on its own people.

But Clinton was far from a passive observer. She was in energetic discussion on the Egyptian news site Masrawy.com, where her presence excited a stream of questions—more than 6,500 in three days—from young people across Egypt. "We hope," she said, "that as Egypt looks at its own future, it takes advantage of all of the people's talents"—Clinton shorthand for including women. She had an immediate answer when a number of questioners suggested that her persistent references to women's rights constituted American meddling in Egyptian affairs: "If a country doesn't recognize minority rights and human rights, including women's rights, you will not have the kind of stability and prosperity that is possible."

The Web chat was only one of dozens of personal exchanges Clinton has committed to during the three months since Tunisia's unrest set off a political explosion whose end is not yet in sight. At every step, she has worked to connect the Middle East's hunger for a new way forward with her categorical imperative: the empowerment of women. Her campaign has begun to resonate in unlikely places. In the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh, where women cannot travel without male permission or drive a car, a grandson of the Kingdom's founding monarch (Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz al-Saud) last month denounced the way women are "economically and socially marginalized" in Arab countries.

"I believe that the rights of women and girls is the unfinished business of the 21st century," Clinton recently told NEWSWEEK during another rare moment relaxing on a couch in the comfortable sitting room of her offices on the State Department's seventh floor, her legs propped up in front of her. "We see women and girls across the world who are oppressed and violated and demeaned and degraded and denied so much of what they are entitled to as our fellow human beings."

Clinton is paying particular attention to whether women's voices are heard within the local groups calling for and leading change in the Middle East. "You don't see women in pictures coming from the demonstrations and the opposition in Libya," she told NEWSWEEK late last week, adding that "the role and safety of women will remain one of our highest priorities." As for Egypt, she said she was heartened by indications that women would be included in the formation of the new government. "We believe that women were in Tahrir Square, and they should be part of the decision-making process. If [the Egyptians] are truly going to have a democracy, they can't leave out half the population."

"I have had quite an experience over the last three months," is how Clinton characterizes the stamina requirements of an amped-up shuttle diplomacy. Two years into her tenure as America's 67th secretary of state, she has out-traveled every one of her predecessors, with 465,000 air miles and 79 countries already behind her. Her Boeing 757's cabin, stocked with a roll-out bed, newspapers, and a corner humidifier, now serves as another home as she flies between diplomatic hot spots, tackling the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, tensions with Iran and North Korea, the Arab-Israeli peace process, and, now, the serial Middle East upheavals. She is, it seems, everywhere at once, crossing time zones and defying jet lag, though signs of exhaustion—a hoarse voice, bleary eyes—slip through. (A recent 19-hour "day trip" to Mexico landed her at Maryland's Andrews Air Force Base well after 2 a.m., which left approximately six hours to get home, sleep, and make her first meeting of the day that would culminate in President Obama's State of the Union address.)

It is hardly the life the former first lady and senator from New York envisioned. Indeed, she can fairly be described as the surprise secretary of state, the country's first formidable female presidential candidate who had made clear her desire to shed the supporting roles of her past. When Barack Obama approached her about assuming the post, it was clear what he got out of the deal: an opportunity to reinforce his "change the tone" pledge by offering a choice role to his one-time competitor, and the credibility, gravitas—and gender balance—her appointment conferred. Less obvious at the time was what she might hope to accomplish. A sense of duty and a want of appealing alternatives may have led her to Foggy Bottom, but Clinton has turned the job into what may well be the role of her lifetime: advocate in chief for women worldwide.

Amid the current unrest and pervasive uncertainty, Clinton's mission has only gained in urgency. As she noted in Qatar in January, two weeks before Egypt's first "day of rage," the Middle East's old foundations were "sinking into the sand." But there has been a hard core of realism to her recognition of a new opening for women. "We are watching and waiting," she said. "People jockey for power, and often the most conservative elements once again use the opportunity to crack down on women and women's roles."

While Clinton views the subjugation of the world's women as a moral question, she plants her argument firmly on the grounds of national security, terrain she knows is far less likely to be attacked as "too soft" to be relevant to U.S. interests. "This is a big deal for American values and for American foreign policy and our interests, but it is also a big deal for our security," she told NEWSWEEK. "Because where women are disempowered and dehumanized, you are more likely to see not just antidemocratic forces, but extremism that leads to security challenges for us."

Championing opportunity and equality for women is the fulfillment of her life's work, but for a time, it looked as if that trajectory might be derailed. In 1974, the blazing young intellect who won national attention with an unscripted response to Sen. Edward Brooke, boldly arguing for the end of the Vietnam War in her Wellesley commencement speech (a speech that landed her on the cover of Life magazine), disappointed her feminist friends by spurning New York and Washington in favor of Fayetteville, Ark., to become the young Bill Clinton's wife.

For two decades, Clinton put her own ambitions second to and in the service of her husband's political rise, enduring personal struggles and eating political crow when her high-profile effort to reform health care at the start of Bill

Clinton's first term ended in a rout. A return to first-lady purdah soon followed.

And then came Beijing. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, organized by the United Nations to advance and promote women's opportunity and equality, stirred Hillary to reassert her own credo as a woman, on behalf of women. She would gather America's delegation and serve as its honorary chair, lending her imprimatur as first lady to put women's rights in the global spotlight at the largest such assembly of its kind.

When word reached the West Wing of Hillary's interest in attending the conference, her husband's aides saw only the political downside for the president and feared the first lady would derail already-fragile bilateral relations. "I did get a call from someone on the National Security Council who said to me, 'My job is to make sure Hillary Clinton doesn't go to China,'" says Theresa Loar, who helped Clinton organize the Beijing delegation. "I am thinking, my job is to make sure it's a rip-roaring success—and guess who is going to succeed?"

Clinton herself says she paid little heed to the political tug-of-war within her husband's administration. "I always intended to go," she says, stressing the word "always." "The real question was, what would I do when I got there ... It became more and more important to me that we really lay down a declaration of American values when it comes to women." And so, clad in a striking pink suit, she ascended the Beijing stage and delivered what The New York Times called "an unflinching speech that may have been her finest moment in public life." Thousands of delegates—women and men—from 180 countries had gathered to hear Clinton, and some of the women cheered and pounded the tables in front of them while she spoke.

"If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights once and for all," Clinton declared. "As long as discrimination and inequities remain so commonplace everywhere in the world, as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked, underpaid, not schooled, subjected to violence in and outside their homes—the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realized."

Those who have worked closely with Clinton on women's issues view that speech as a turning point for an embattled first lady. "What Mrs. Clinton so clearly realized in Beijing was that she had a voice and she had power," says Alyse Nelson, president of the women's leadership group Vital Voices Global Partnership, who paid her own way to the conference as a college student. "And she could use that voice to help those who had no power."

Mu Sochua met Clinton in Beijing and credits Clinton's speech with changing her career path. "That was the day I decided to enter politics," says Sochua, now a prominent Cambodian opposition leader. "Watching her I had the sense that I could do it, that other women could do it, if we really spoke from the bottom of our hearts and reflected the voices of women."

Significantly, at the age of 63, Hillary Clinton is once again focusing on the issues that first inspired her to seek a life of public service more than four decades ago, a time when America's schools remained segregated and no woman had ever served on the Supreme Court, been elected mayor of a major city, or entered the country's military academies.

Despite her punishing schedule, Clinton appears far more at ease with her own role and in her own skin than ever before. Even her oft-commented style—the coiffed hair, a wardrobe of tailored pantsuits—now shows a settled sureness. Clinton's political instincts may have served others—principally her husband—to great effect, but over the years they have often done her a disservice. Today, she exudes not just the confidence that her White House-era trials are behind her but the conviction that they are beside the point. In crafting her role as secretary of state, she has shown remarkable political dexterity and a marked absence of inner conflict, crystallized by the moral clarity of addressing injustices faced by young girls sold into slavery or mothers raped in front of their children.

In January, Clinton became the first secretary of state in two decades to visit Yemen. It's a country infiltrated by Al Qaeda, and so she talked security and development issues in three hours cloistered with Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh at his sprawling presidential compound. It's also a country where a man may marry a girl of 9, and so Clinton sought out the kind of people who rarely meet American secretaries of state—the students, community activists, and,

most obviously, the women. She toured the narrow streets of the capital's old city to the great dismay of her security detail; through the windows of her heavily armored SUV she caught sight of men in traditional clothes, knives dangling from their belts, and children yelling "welcome" in Arabic. Missing from the scene: virtually any sign of the country's women.

Arriving at a packed conference center in a luxury hotel complex perched above the old city, Clinton found young men and women packed into a raucous town-hall meeting. When she finished speaking, a cluster of Yemeni women's activists approached. A petite young woman wearing a glitter-fringed black head scarf and a denim jacket with BEAUTY embroidered on its sleeve told the secretary the women needed advice about how to stop child marriage. During her remarks, Clinton had cited the story of Nujood Ali, a Yemeni girl in the audience that day whose very public fight for a divorce at age 11 has become a global cause célèbre—one that Clinton herself follows closely.

"Today, Nujood is back in school where she belongs, learning English along with her studies," Clinton told the crowd. "And I really see her as an inspiration and representative of so many other young girls who can contribute positively to their families and their country."

By Clinton's side as she spoke was Melanne Verveer, ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, a post Clinton encouraged President Obama to create when she became secretary. In 1995, while serving as Clinton's chief of staff, Verveer helped the first lady create the President's Interagency Council on Women. With Verveer as her trusted deputy, Clinton pushes for recognition of women's contributions in traditional areas such as health and education, along with newer and, in her view, equally critical arenas such as diplomacy and peacekeeping. "Politics is seen in most societies, including our own, I would add, as a largely male sport—unarmed combat—and women are very often ignored or pushed aside in an effort to gain or consolidate power," she says. Her work aims to change that.

During Clinton's daylong stop in Papua New Guinea last November, Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare sought to dismiss concerns about domestic violence. "Sometimes there are fights, arguments do take place, but it's nothing very brutal," Somare said, before asserting that "a person ... cannot control [himself] when he's under the influence of liquor." Clinton noted pointedly that one of her highest priorities was "enabling more women to have access to their rights, to take their position in society" and she added—evidently to the surprise of those traveling with her—that Verveer would be returning to Papua New Guinea to "figure out what else the United States can do, so that we have even more women playing leadership roles in every aspect of your society."

"Let's stay true to our values" is, Clinton says, her message to the American public. "Let's continue to stand up for those who are vulnerable to being left out or marginalized." It's a pledge in sync with a growing national awareness of the unappreciated potential of women and girls around the world. Children now study the young readers' edition of *Three Cups of Tea* as part of their classroom curriculum, while an increasing number of college-age students are committing time to NGOs involved with women's issues. And though Washington is proving slower to embrace Clinton's cause, her own popularity is soaring: she is the second-most-admired woman in America (after Oprah Winfrey), according to a NEWSWEEK poll of women in late February.

Meanwhile, the State Department's 2012 fiscal-year request includes \$1.2 billion in programs specifically targeting women, \$832 million of which will go toward global health initiatives. Tellingly, comparisons with past years can't be made, since the department only started tracking women-focused dollars in 2010. Once a month, Verveer meets by videoconference with the Afghanistan Gender Task Force, which packs into a narrow room in the heavily fortified U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan's capital. During a 2009 visit, she unveiled what is now the \$36 million Ambassador's Small Grants Program to Support Gender Equality, which has awarded 523 grants totaling \$8 million via the USAID contractor Creative Associates. Most awards last less than four months, but two dozen have gone to organizations working on long-term change, such as a domestic violence law that went into effect last year.

Afghan grant recipient Suraya Pakzad's Voice of Women offers refuge to women who suffer beatings and mental abuse at the hands of husbands and in-laws. Thuraya Dammaj, a Yemeni human-rights activist, plans to use a Middle East-focused \$25,000 State Department grant to push for quotas to get more women into Parliament and to repeal a law allowing the marriage of young girls.

During Clinton's last Middle East visit, former Iraqi minister Bakhtiar Amin told her he worried about the increasing invisibility of women in Iraq's government. Once there were six female ministers, Amin noted, and now there was only one. Clinton pledged to follow up. "The secretary remembers things, she takes notes, she asks questions weeks or months" after the fact, according to Patrick Kennedy, undersecretary for management at the State Department. "She checks on the issues she cares about, deeply and specifically," keeping track of it all with her famous to-do lists.

"I honestly think Hillary Clinton wakes up every day thinking about how to improve the lives of women and girls," says Theresa Loar. "And I don't know another world leader who is doing that."

Clinton's knack for personalizing foreign policy was evident last month, when she convened the annual gathering of the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. It's another issue she began working on in the mid-1990s, and in a borderless world with instant communication, sexual slavery has exploded into an epidemic; the State Department estimates there are now 12.3 million adults and children worldwide in "forced labor, bonded labor, and forced prostitution."

Squeezed in elbow to elbow around a long wooden table in the State Department's Jefferson Room was a virtual cabinet gathering, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano. As host of the meeting, which began so promptly that several attendees sheepishly slid in late, Clinton asked each of the officials to share their team's progress. She moved briskly around the table, then stopped to make a frank appeal. "One thing I would urge, if you do get a chance, is to visit a shelter, a site where trafficking victims have been rescued and are being rehabilitated," she said to a room that had suddenly gone silent. "I recently was in Cambodia, and it is just so overwhelmingly heartbreaking and inspiring to see these young girls. One girl lost her eyes—to punish her, the owner of the brothel had stabbed her in the eye with a nail," Clinton continued. "She was the most optimistic, cheerful young woman, just a tremendous spirit. What she wants to do when she grows up is help other victims of trafficking, so there is just an enormous amount of work to be done."

The shelter Clinton referred to is run by the Cambodian activist Somaly Mam, who herself was forced into a brothel as a little girl. Mam credits Clinton's visit with making her work rescuing young victims respectable in the eyes of her government. "She protects our lives," Mam says simply, noting that during her visit Clinton took the time to talk with the girls and that many of the shelter's children now keep photos of her on their walls. "Our people never paid attention. Hillary has opened their eyes, so now they have no choice; by her work she has saved many lives in Cambodia—our government is changing."

For her part, Clinton says that her ambition now is to move the discussion beyond a reliance on her own celebrity. She must, she says, take her work on women's behalf "out of the interpersonal and turn it into the international." At the State Department, that goal is reflected in a new and sweeping strategic blueprint known as the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), which establishes priorities over a four-year horizon. Women and girls are mentioned 133 times across the 220 pages of the final QDDR document.

By institutionalizing a process that recognizes the importance of women's involvement, Clinton hopes her successors will continue what she has started. Many of those on the front lines of implementing Clinton's changes say they believe her message will stick. "Once you have built this track record, it is much harder to ignore it," says Anne-Marie Slaughter, who served as a chief architect of the QDDR process. But some women's-rights advocates who applaud Clinton's leadership aren't so sure. "When I go to Iraq or Afghanistan and I meet State Department officials, I don't see women's issues at the core of the discussion," says Zainab Salbi, who heads Women for Women International. (See *My Turn*, page 40.) Salbi notes that on a recent trip to the southern Iraqi province of Diwaniya, she had to fight to convince her State interlocutors that spending precious program dollars on women was a worthwhile investment. "Their patriarchy and chauvinism," she says, "was harder on Iraqi culture than Iraqis themselves."

"There is a culture at State, and you have to break through that culture," admits one former ambassador. "The guys who work on country-to-country relationships don't think these issues are central." Clinton's efforts could easily stall or be reversed when she and Verveer leave, he adds, in part because each is so good at what she does. "I think the

combination of those two personalities is crucial, and that's why I can't be at all sure it will last beyond this administration."

Speculation continues that Clinton would stay on in a second Obama term, and a few pundits go as far as to suggest she might even make another White House run in 2016, though Bill Clinton joked recently that his wife now covets the title of grandmother far more than that of commander in chief. For now, Hillary Clinton is sticking to her story that she is getting ready to take a break from public life.

Asked whether she worries her eventual departure from the State Department will endanger the future of her mission, Clinton admits to feeling a great weight of responsibility for all the women and girls she has met and the many millions of others like them. "It is why there are 133 references to women and girls in the QDDR," she says, turning reflexively to the hard evidence. "It is why I mention the issue in every setting I am in, and why I mention it with every foreign leader I meet.

"It is like any challenge," she goes on, her tone brightening. "You just keep at it, take it piece by piece, seize the ground you can, hang onto it, and then move forward a little bit more." She pauses. "And we are heading for higher ground."

Lemmon, a fellow with the Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of The Dressmaker of Khair Khana, published this month.