

Women's Rights and the U.S. State Department Under and After Hillary Clinton

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Women's and Girl's Issues

An Interview with Jacquelyn Ingrassia

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Brown Journal of World Affairs: For our readers who may be less familiar, can you tell us about the specific work you did for the U.S. State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues?

Klein: When Hillary Clinton became secretary of state, she created a new office, the Office of Global Women's Issues, and elevated its status by putting it within the Office of the Secretary. There had been an office handling women's issues at various points at State, but Secretary Clinton elevated the office and the designation of the head to be an ambassador-at-large.¹ This was designed to send a signal internally, as well as externally, about the importance of women's issues and gender equality to her, but also to really have it report directly to the secretary outside of the sort of general lines of authority within the State De-

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partment. The idea behind that was really to have the office's work span many areas, so I worked on a broad range of issues—including global health issues and girl's education, which, as you know, are integrally related—but I also had the specific charge of both helping develop and highlight the evidence base about why advancing women's rights and opportunities is important to U.S. foreign policy and trying to help figure out how to implement that across the State Department. The State Department, in case readers don't know, is organized functionally and regionally. There are bureaus that cover every region of the world, and there are also bureaus that cover particular topic areas: population and refugees, democracy, human rights. The idea, again, was to be able to ensure that gender equality work was being integrated throughout all of those different bureaus.

Journal: What are some of the specific ways that you tried to integrate gender-related efforts into foreign policy?

Klein: First and foremost, we made the case. I spoke yesterday [at Brown's School of Public Health] and made the point that these are issues of human rights. Whenever I give a talk, or I am explaining what we did and why we did it, I always explain that it starts from that basis. This is an issue of fairness; this is an issue of basic human rights. On top of that, there's also a strong argument that's really developed over the past 10 years that there's a strategic basis for investing in women and girls, so one of the first things that we did was actually to try to develop that evidence. We relied on data to really make the case—and that was both an internal and external objective—so when one of us or Secretary Clinton would meet with counterparts around the world, we would talk about what we know and why this matters.

The second thing we did was to take a very practical, nuts and bolts approach. Secretary Clinton released a document called the *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (QDDR), and it was modeled on a similar document that the Defense Department had done. It's a top-to-bottom look at the department—there's actually been a subsequent one under Secretary Kerry—to look at how to make the State Department more effective. It really covers everything: it covers the organization of the department and it covers how you do your work. In that document, gender was integrated throughout, which was significant. There were 130 references to gender issues throughout the QDDR, so that it wasn't just seen as an issue of public diplomacy, which some people think of it as; it wasn't just seen as an issue of development.

So then you have this big document, which is basically like a road map. The secretary then issued more specific policy guidance, which was a short document that went to every bureau and embassy around the world, to 70,000 State Department employees—and what that did was translate the QDDR into practical, “here’s-what-you-do” terms. It was divided into four sections: Strategic Planning and Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation, Programming, and Management and Training. And again, it really tried to unpack the question of “What does it mean?” because if you believe that gender equality matters, that doesn’t mean you know what to do to integrate that into your work. So that’s what the policy guidance was intended to do.

USAID (United States Agency for International Development) produced similar gender guidance. The goal was the same; it was very complementary. And then another important piece that I always like to point to—and this was, again, part of the guidance—is the training of foreign service officers. So when foreign service officers begin their service at the State Department, they’re required to undergo training, and then again every three years or so. We helped revise the curriculum so that their training covered gender. When I left, there was a stand-alone gender course, which you could choose to take in person, and the idea was that in the next iteration it would be virtual, so that if you were a foreign service officer in Sierra Leone, you could also take this course virtually. That was going to be required of all incoming foreign service officers. In addition to that, a goal was to break the course up into different modules over the course of time, so if you were finishing a three-year rotation in Sierra Leone and then going to Paris for a different posting, you might need some additional training, and there would be a gender piece within that overall training.

All of those pieces sound probably bureaucratic, but the thing I always like to emphasize is that in an institution that’s as big and has been around as long as the State Department, what’s on paper matters. I mean, first and foremost, leadership matters, so you had a secretary who clearly prioritized these issues and cared deeply about these issues, and everybody knew that. But the second thing that was really a revelation to me, as somebody who sort of parachuted into the State Department, was that institutionalizing these practices and providing training was hugely important, and you saw over time people really doing their work differently.

Journal: So what does that specific training focus on, what are foreign service officers learning, and what are the goals of those training programs?

Klein: So it depends, again, on what bureau you're in. When you talk about sexual and reproductive rights and health, it's easier because it's obviously about women, but there are many areas which were not obviously about women. To take a good example, there is a food security program called Feed the Future. If you look around the world, the majority of small farmers are women, but people wouldn't generally think about a food security program as a women's program. So the idea was to work with the people who run those programs, who conceive of those programs, to collectively consider what matters: Why does a woman's health matter? Why does violence against women matter? Why does a woman's

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ability to be an independent economic participant in her society and get adequately reimbursed for the work that she does matter? Whether

she is getting paid for her work, or she is doing unpaid work in the home—how do all those things add up to making a program more effective? And again the argument was: it's the right thing to do to make sure that a woman farmer has what she needs. It's the right thing to do for her family, but it's also more broadly the way that you're going to make that program more effective.

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Journal: How do you reconcile the fact that the United States itself still has some shortcomings as far as gender equality goes? How do you reconcile that with your leading these sorts of programs?

Klein: My answer to that is that there is no country in the world where true gender equality exists. A lot of people look at Western Europe and the United States—maybe even less so than Western Europe—and say they're pretty good for women. And they are. And I don't mean to suggest that the situation for a college freshman at Brown in the United States is the same as the situation for many other women and girls around the world. On the other hand, to your point, we still have a long way to go, too. We don't have equal pay; we don't have paid leave. And there are some very basic things that most of the rest of the world has and that American women don't have. That said, I don't think that stops you from trying to improve the situation here, while also improving the situation abroad. There are countries that have signed onto the Convention to the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the United States has not signed it. We are one of seven UN member states, including the Holy See and Palau and a couple of others, that have not signed it. That's another argument that is used against us when we try to talk about gender

equality around the world: if you haven't even ratified this convention, how can you speak to what's happening in Yemen or Saudi Arabia for women? And again, I hope we will sign CEDAW; I am a firm believer that it actually really matters to have it ratified here in the United States. But it is extremely difficult to get two thirds of the Senate to do anything, these days in particular. I don't think that should stop us from being advocates around the world. You're not saying "we're better" by advocating for women's rights in Yemen. What you're saying is "there is an issue and it is the right thing to do to address the levels of discrimination and inequality."

Journal: Let's shift toward reproductive and sexual health. A lot of critiques of how sexual health and reproductive health are disseminated throughout the developing world have centered around cultural ties and national sovereignty, especially with regard to religious stigmas. How have you attempted to work within national and cultural contexts when you're trying to solidify these rights?

Klein: It's hard. On some issues, I like to quote Secretary Clinton. Not so much with regard to access to sexual and reproductive health services, but more so on things like violence where people introduce the notion of culture, she likes to say: "violence isn't cultural, it is criminal." So yes, there are some long-standing traditional practices or other cultural bases for practices where I just draw a bright line. I feel comfortable arguing that some things are quite simply violations of human rights.

When you talk about issues like access to contraception and family planning services, yes, there are obviously places in the world, even here in the United States, where people have deeply held religious, or other, reservations. What I would point to is that if you look at the overall trajectory, we have made a lot of progress. We have made a lot of progress in actual outcomes for women. I was recently working on the passage of the Sustainable Development Goals. The notion of sexual and reproductive health is in the goals. It is a huge step, it doesn't always feel like a huge step, but it is a huge step that all these countries have agreed to include sexual and reproductive rights in a set of goals that they've agreed to. But it doesn't make those rights a reality. It doesn't make the women who are in a rural village in Ethiopia actually receive necessary ser-

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vices. It is the first step. Step two is a lot of advocacy, a lot of political will, and a lot more resources. I would say that's my list of things that we need in order to make sure equality becomes a reality in women's lives. International treaties or conventions matter, as do national laws that often follow. That's a huge step also, but if those laws aren't enforced, or if it's not particularly clear what either an individual or a government's responsibilities are, then we have a lot more work to do. And I do think we still have a lot more work to do.

I spent two years at the Clinton Foundation working on a project called No Ceilings, the goal of which was to measure progress that women and girls have made on pretty much all of the 12 areas of the Beijing Platform for Action

over the past 20 years, 1995–2015.

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women's political leadership, economic empowerment, and violence. But then if you look a layer below, the more striking thing we learned was about the vast inequality within countries among different groups of women. Even if you look at health, access to health care and also health outcomes, there are tremendous differences among women. Although it seems obvious at one level, the numbers are pretty striking: racial and ethnic minorities, poor women, and indigenous women do far worse than other women in their countries. So, yes, there is a lot of work to be done.

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Journal: You have gotten many people to sign these treaties and implement these training programs—what do you see as the next step in securing international women's rights?

Klein: I think we are on the cusp. The fact that we have all these rights on paper is hugely important. So is the fact that people are talking about them. I give Secretary Clinton so much credit because this is her passion and she's been so vocal on these issues. But she's now been replaced by Secretary Kerry, and he's still talking about women's issues—not to the extent that she does, but these issues have really started to become part of the U.S. government's and the UN's discussions. More than discussions, rights have really been elevated on the world stage. You have a G8 that focused on maternal mortality; you have

these issues being discussed at the World Bank; you have the head of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, who's championed women's issues in the work of the IMF. I mean these major institutions, which weren't always the places where these discussions happened, are now talking about them.

You also have a strong civil society working on women's issues. This really started in Beijing with the 1,000 advocates who gathered in a town about an hour from Beijing because this is where the Chinese government had put them. Advocates had been working on these issues for generations, but this was sort of a turning point where everybody was together—by the way, it was pouring rain and muddy. It was this sort of galvanizing experience. Between then and now, I think you've seen a huge grassroots movement, and I think the political leadership at the top and the grassroots pressure from the bottom have really created this moment. And I think those are the things that really need to continue. And new tools. For example, we have social media, which brings these issues to the forefront—you can't ignore it because the picture is in front of you, of Malala or of the woman with the blue bra in Tahrir Square in Egypt. You cannot not see those things today. And then we have new partners. If you look at what happened in Beijing as an example, you had governments meeting—189 governments—and you had this vibrant advocacy community by civil society, but the private sector was nowhere to be found. And now, if you look at pretty much any meeting that discusses women's issues, you have a serious private sector presence. They're either creating the evidence base, like the Goldman Sachs' and McKinseys of the world. Who would have thought that they would have produced a report—Citibank recently did one too—on the importance of women's labor force participation? And then you have companies that are figuring out that this is not just a piece of their corporate social responsibility, but that women are part of their value chain. Agree or disagree generally with the company, but you have companies like ExxonMobil or Coca Cola which are investing in women because it is better for their bottom line. So an overall answer to say is that we have a lot more to do, but we have a lot of opportunity.

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Journal: Do you have any particular visions for the State Department? How do you think the office will change with a new president?

Klein: First, I hope and believe that the work of the Office of Global Women's Issues will and should continue. Second, we should continue the efforts that began to make sure that gender is integrated throughout the work of the entire State Department.

Journal: How do you see those changes coming about? Do you feel optimistic about them, or do you think there needs to be more of a push?

Klein: I'm definitely optimistic. There was a tremendous amount of progress made under Secretary Clinton and a lot of progress made after she left. The office has continued to be a very vibrant part of the State Department. So I'm completely optimistic that the work will continue and that people understand the value—because we started with data, we started by proving the case. I think today at the State Department and in many other institutions people think about how, for example, working on reducing barriers to women's labor force participation improves the economy, or why peace processes may be more effective and long-lasting if women participate in negotiations. I think because of the wealth of data proving the case, there are many people who may not have historically seen women as part of their portfolio who now see the value of including women and including women's issues in what they think about.

Journal: You mentioned the importance of “arguments for a strategic basis in investing in women and girls.” Can you elaborate a bit on what some of those are?

Klein: There is a great deal of research showing that investing in women has strategic value. Education is one strong example: if you invest in girls' education, there are long-term positive effects for the economy. An educated woman can participate in her economy and earn better wages—and that impacts her, her family, and the economy overall. Education also improves the health of the next generation. Educated mothers have been shown to have healthier children. Another example where there's been less quantitative research but some really valuable qualitative research is the area of peace and security. If you look

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at peace negotiations, for example, where women are involved in conflict resolution, the result is often a longer lasting and more sustainable peace. Why? Research has shown that women raise issues that are important to long-term stability,

including issues of human security, such as things like health care and education, while more traditional peace processes have been overly focused on dividing land or weapons. There is a famous story that is representative of a larger point:

during a peace negotiation in the 1990s, the men at the table (of course, women were not allowed to participate, but the men brought women as invited guests) were discussing a river and arguing over which faction should have control over the river. One of the women leaned into one of the men at the table and explained that the river had dried up years ago. Therefore, they were arguing over a riverbed, not a river. It's a perfect example of women knowing the facts on the ground: they're the ones going to get the water at the river. So those are just a few examples, but there are many others out of the vast body of research that shows that investing in women and girls is of strategic importance, as well as the right thing to do as a matter of fairness, dignity, and basic human rights.

Journal: Could you elaborate a bit on how you've seen people improve and how programs such as foreign service officer training programs or the QDDR document have actually changed results on the ground?

Klein: "Gender integration" has gone from a concept, an idea, to a working practice. So, for example, if someone is thinking about a food security program, they're thinking about women farmers in a way they haven't necessarily thought of before. They're thinking about how to get women resources and access to credit, maybe even changing laws so women can own the land they farm. As I've said before, not only is it a great thing to do because women who are working should be valued, but also because it will have positive long-term economic effects. You can see that across our development programs and our diplomacy: people are thinking about women's issues in a new way. 

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1. See the Brown Journal of World Affairs' interview with then-Ambassador-at-Large Catherine Russell at: <http://watson.brown.edu/news/explore/2016/AmbCatherineRussell>.

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