

Anne-Marie Slaughter: The Thought Leader Interview by Art Kleiner

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Photograph by Peter Gregoire

The Thought Leader Interview: Anne-Marie Slaughter

The dean of Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School shows how networks are fundamentally changing the nature of government.

by Art Kleiner

During the last 15 years, there has been a persistent erosion of the perceived effectiveness of the public sector. Leaders across the political spectrum have put forth bold plans and initiatives that have failed in their execution, and have mismanaged challenges as varied as financial crises, natural disasters, and accusations of their own internal corruption. When a government initiative collapses, there is always someone available to blame. But what if the source of these failures is the nature of government itself, not the individuals who lead it? What if there has been a mostly unacknowledged, tsunami-scale shift in the context in which government operates — so that it takes a very different kind of public-sector organization to succeed than it did in the past? And what if most leaders have not yet come to terms with this new reality?

That's the thesis put forward by Anne-Marie Slaughter, dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. In her 2004 book, *A New World Order* (Princeton University Press), Slaughter suggests that the most effective public-sector

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initiatives, particularly on the international scale, are those that take place quietly through networks of professionals working on common problems. And in her new book, *The Idea That Is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World* (Perseus, 2007), she argues that if governments can use networks to become more responsive, collaborative, and flexible, they will more closely embody the ideas and principles that fostered modern democracy in the first place.

Transgovernmental networks typically emerge in response to global challenges. For example, government officials of what is now the Group of Eight (G8) nations (France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States, Canada, and Russia) began to meet informally in the 1970s in response to that era's oil price crisis. Although they never established a formal administrative structure, the G8's network of finance ministers is now one of the primary groups that make decisions about international debt relief. In *A New World Order*, Slaughter cites many other such networks: financial regulators seeking to freeze terrorist assets; law enforcement officials sharing information

on criminal suspects; environmental agency officials coordinating regulations; judges exchanging decisions on the Internet; and legislators reaching out to one another on such issues as the death penalty and human rights.

Some of these networks are increasingly well known, including the Group of Twenty (G-20), which was set up in response to the Asian financial crises of the late 1990s; the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO); and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), an international network for enforcement of weapons bans. Other networks are so informal that they don't even have names, let alone structures. These new networks will not, in themselves, solve the problems of government today. But just as corporate leaders have moved from rigid, top-down hierarchies to more flexible structures that take better advantage of the capabilities of employees and better reflect the realities of the hyperconnected world, government is also under pressure to change.

Slaughter's insights provide a starting point for not just understanding those changes intellectually, but also feeling our

way to the kinds of changes we need to make in ourselves, whether we are young professionals beginning careers, veteran government agency staff members, or business leaders seeking roles in the larger sphere.

This view of networks will remind some readers of Joseph Nye's theory of "soft power" or Francis Fukuyama's writing on the political importance of trust. (Both Nye and Fukuyama were active members of the recently concluded Princeton Project on National Security, which Slaughter codirected.) It also resonates with a concept familiar to readers of *strategy+business*: the design of "megacommunities" as meeting grounds for multilateral action by public, private, and civil organizations. (See "When There Is No Cavalry," by Douglas Himberger, David Sulek, and Stephen Krill Jr., *s+b*, Autumn 2007.)

We met with Anne-Marie Slaughter in her office at Princeton University in April. Though her new book focuses on the United States, the conversation covered issues of interest to any country: the emerging power of international networks; the role of the state in a more ambiguous, multilateral environment; and the ways in which

business and individual actions might have to shift accordingly.

S+B: Your work portrays the “new world order” as governance through networks, a circumstance where neither government nor business is as centralized as it used to be, where work is accomplished through alliances instead of hierarchical authority, and where power and leadership are more open-ended and participative. When did you first see this model emerging?

SLAUGHTER: In the early 1990s, when I was studying the differences between liberal and non-liberal democracies. Liberal democracies are countries with a strong rule of law and constitutional protections; non-liberal countries either have elected leaders who put themselves above the law or dictatorships of various kinds.

When I looked closely at relations among liberal democracies, I saw that they had many more trans-governmental networks of government officials than their non-liberal counterparts. For example, the judges of OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] countries will often be in regular contact with one another, and so will immigration officers and environmental officials. They regularly share information and work on common projects. Even when their elected leaders disagree, these networks continue to operate. The problems they’re dealing with spill across international borders; they have to reach out to their counterparts in other nations.

That little tail in my research started wagging the dog, because the more I looked at networks, the more important they seemed to be. Although political scientists had

noticed the existence of trans-governmental networks in some fields back in the 1970s, no academics saw them as a major shift in the nature of government. People actually working in government, however, knew that something important had happened. Financial regulators knew that central bankers were talking; the securities commissioners and antitrust regulators were aware that each other’s networks existed. I realized that this represented a new paradigm.

It took 10 years to write *A New World Order*. I had two children along the way; I did a million other things; I wrote many other articles. But one reason it took so long was that the new world of networked governance was multiplying faster than I could write about it. Every time I sat down to finish the draft, there would be a whole new raft of examples to include.

In 1996, when I thought I would never get the book done, I wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs* called “The Real New World Order.” I was optimistic enough to describe these networks as a kind of panacea. In the future, I thought, international organizations like the World Trade Organization and the United Nations would be much less important, and we would not need new ones. Instead, global problems would be solved by these new trans-governmental networks. Businesses were operating this way; nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] were going this way. And this thesis got a lot of attention.

S+B: How has your thinking changed since then?

SLAUGHTER: I now see that these networks are not panaceas. Sure, they’re more effective at getting

things done than the old formal system. But we’re not using these networks intelligently. They have big disadvantages as well as advantages, and the real challenge is to figure out when they are valuable and when they are not. If these are the building blocks of governance in the 21st century, then anyone who’s thinking about how to solve global problems should learn to use them effectively.

There are precious few people in government who are saying, “Instead of creating a treaty, or instead of convening a coalition of the willing to go to war against terrorism, let’s design a network for collaborative action. Let’s make it open to many different countries, but not so inclusive that we undermine its speed and flexibility.”

Nested Agendas

S+B: You portray the networks as growing fast, but you say that people aren’t using them. Which is true?

SLAUGHTER: That’s the funny part: Both statements are true. The trans-governmental networks have grown organically and under the radar of many officials. They represent a dramatic change, but they’re still small enough that they’re easy to ignore. It’s my proposition that we could be much more efficient and effective if we take the networks that exist, build on them, streamline them, and make them more inclusive.

S+B: How would that work — especially in such thorny areas of international relations as responses to terrorism?

SLAUGHTER: Imagine if George W. Bush had stood up in 2001 after 9/11 and said, “OK, we’re in a post-1945 kind of moment. We have a

threat; we face it; we see it. Today, the world has come together behind the United States. We are going to do what we did in the late 1940s. We're going to fight a specific terrorist group — al Qaeda — but we're also going to fight the deeper forces that gave rise to it. We'll do this by creating a set of global institutions, just as we did once before with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Marshall Plan, and the United Nations. But this time we'll create a different kind of institution. We will have a global network of law enforcement agencies. A global network of health officials and education officials working to create real opportunity for poor and humiliated populations, who would otherwise be drawn to extremist religion and violent ideologies. And we are also setting up a new global network of transport officials to make travel safe everywhere." The aftermath might have been very different.

S+B: Presumably, politicians resist that approach — not just in the U.S., but everywhere — because they assume it would constrain their independence.

SLAUGHTER: Well, it's the anti-thesis of cowboy geopolitics. Although to be fair, the [United States] State Department is now much more open to this kind of multilateral engagement. But for a network to work, you actually have to be willing to engage, and that means to possibly change the way you do things. And to be persuasive, you have to be willing to be persuaded, and that's a risk.

S+B: Is it so important for government officials to take that risk?

SLAUGHTER: If you're confronting

an incredibly complex world and you're only thinking in official terms, then you're using the thinking of the 20th century to solve 21st-century problems — problems like money laundering, climate change, and global epidemics.

Above all, you don't see the world as other people inhabit it. For example, criminal organizations are all networks. That's why they're so hard to fight. Corporations are all generally operating through networks, both within corporations and in their supply chains. And certainly nongovernmental organizations are significantly networked. Yet the formal side of government operates through stovepipe hierarchies that come together on a formal basis. If you don't recognize the emerging networks in government and deploy them effectively, then you don't really have the tools to realize government's potential.

S+B: It sounds like you're envisioning a government of agencies that are, in effect, like business units, each with its own agenda.

SLAUGHTER: That's a great image. And it's exactly what I saw happening. In *A New World Order*, I called it the "disaggregated state." Power isn't going away, but it's operating in a more diverse fashion.

When you talk to people in U.S. embassies about their visitors, they tell you it's nonstop officials from other departments in their own governments. It's not the diplomats or the citizens, but the agriculture minister, the transportation guy, the finance person. They're all coming to share information and get some project under way.

The people I know who get this shift faster than anybody else are military leaders. Their international

networks have been extremely valuable in stabilizing parts of the world. For example, when India and Pakistan almost came to nuclear blows in 1999, U.S. General Anthony Zinni was able to reach out to his contacts in both places. And that was vital. More recently, some military leaders have been upset with the Bush administration's policy of cutting off our International Military Education and Training [IMET] program from countries that support the International Criminal Court.

S+B: What happens when, at the military level, there is a lot of connection and exchange of information — and then the countries go to war with each other?

SLAUGHTER: Even a disaggregated state can be pulled back in pretty quickly if need be. And obviously when relations get tense, everybody tends to come back under central direction. But the flip side is, when things go bad with a particular country, we can still have good relations with people there.

For example, as the second Iraq war began, in 2003, the Americans were furious with the French and Germans. Yet I remember talking to the German minister of justice,

“The career path in government has changed. The best people don’t want to work in one organization for 30 years.”

who said that his ties with [then] Attorney General John Ashcroft had never been closer. They were communicating regularly about the Hamburg cells and other evidence about al Qaeda’s activities. Libya and Sudan are examples of difficult countries where this type of small-scale cooperation is a real asset. And when dealing with difficult countries, we need to deploy all the assets we have. Maybe we talk to one country about environmental issues and to another about finance. Yes, this approach will make life more complicated. But I’d rather be cooperating with a difficult country on something, at least.

The Multisector Career Path

S+B: Where else do you see networks taking hold?

SLAUGHTER: Interestingly, we see it with our students. One of the first things I tell our master in public affairs [MPA] students is that the career path in government has changed. Most of them will hold multiple jobs. They should think about the issues they’re interested in — whether human rights, the environment, HIV/AIDS, energy, or geopolitics — and then pursue

those issues in the private sector, the government sector, and the non-profit sector, with maybe 10 or 15 years in each sector. Only if you move among them do you meet the people and learn the culture of all three sectors. And only then can you bring all three groups together to work on these issues.

That’s a big change. In international relations there used to be a 30-year, one-job career model. Now the U.S. State Department has a hard time getting the people they want because our best students don’t want to work in one organization for 30 years, and they have spouses with careers, who aren’t going to follow them around the world. Instead, you have people like one of my star students from Harvard Law School, Suzanne Nossel. After graduating, she worked under Richard Holbrooke at the U.S. Embassy to the United Nations. She then worked for Dow Jones, and is now the chief of operations at Human Rights Watch. Both government and nonprofits now want people like her, with experience, skills, and contacts in all three areas. This type of multifaceted career fits with the sort of dynamic movement that these students see for

themselves, and with the networks that they want to build.

S+B: Isn’t it a legitimate concern that all this networking will distract leaders from their own constituents and undermine their own mandate?

SLAUGHTER: That’s an interesting question. Yes, it is a risk, but only if you, as a leader, see yourself as an autonomous agent who has charted a course and doesn’t want to be deflected. If you’re comfortable with letting your perspective evolve, then you can be much more effective leading a network.

And should we, as leaders, be so afraid of being persuaded? It’s not clear that this is a danger if you have a more free-form approach to getting results.

S+B: For example...?

SLAUGHTER: I was thinking about Google and other creative workplaces where people brainstorm easily, and where work is fluid. That’s a cultural shift from plan-and-control leadership to being able to react and adapt. I recently heard a senior executive of a major engineering firm say, “We don’t plan anymore.” The pace of change was accelerating so fast, he said, that the best they could

“I don’t imagine governments suddenly populated with folks like the founders of Google. But some issues require it.”

do was react faster than everybody else. So why bother planning? You see what’s coming down the pike and you go with it.

It takes a certain personality type to become comfortable with this type of leadership. I don’t imagine our governments are suddenly going to be populated with folks like the founders of Google. But some issues require it.

Take water scarcity. There’s a lot of politics in it, it’s complicated, the stakes couldn’t be higher, and it’s changing rapidly. You might imagine creating a European–Middle Eastern–American network for the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf watersheds, and saying to the officials, “We want you to come up with some solutions.” In other words, you empower the actual officials who must implement those solutions to be more creative in developing them.

Similarly, right now there is a proposal to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] to include Israel. But we could think more broadly about linking officials on a project basis. In the Middle East, that type of approach could use networks to help change the culture.

You have to define that space pretty carefully. You can’t just go letting networks make decisions without accountability or oversight. But it’s a far better way of tackling these global problems than establishing a world water authority or another security council — or a world environmental organization or global financial authority, for that matter. Those are not real solutions. Even if people wanted them, they would be unwieldy and clunky to administer.

Virtual Bureaucracies

S+B: What, then, would the downside of networks be?

SLAUGHTER: First, their power isn’t always checked — or perceived to be checked. Nobody is ever quite sure what’s going on in their private meetings, and outsiders think that these are technocrats making decisions on their own without any democratic oversight or accountability. This comes up in the U.S. in controversies over the meetings of judges across international boundaries. Observers see judges sharing information about international law and worry, wrongly in my view, that those same judges will make deci-

sions that aren’t faithful to American precedent. You hear the same thing when environmental officials or financial regulators get together: “They’re colluding and it will shape the domestic outcome.”

It’s very hard to know how much of that collusion is happening. I think some is, but not nearly as much as the public reaction would suggest. The answer is to provide a framework of accountability that makes it clear how much leeway the specialists should have and should not have.

S+B: Wouldn’t that be very hard to put into place?

SLAUGHTER: It is a big challenge, particularly in an era of rising distrust of government. Unless we’re thoughtful about the parameters within which our officials can operate with their counterparts abroad, we could witness a big backlash. On the Web site of Public Citizen, the NGO founded by Ralph Nader, there is a “Harmonization Handbook” that targets global networks of food and environmental safety regulators. I see those networks as relatively benign and even as ways to raise the capacity of less-empowered countries. But Public Citizen sees

them as places where government officials get together with corporations and sell out the people on a technocratic basis.

When you look closely, there's not much hard data to support this. But it remains a politically explosive issue. On the conservative side, there's the controversy over judges. In fact, it's good for regulators, judges, and many other officials to be exposed to the rest of the world. But it's easy to whip up popular sentiment against this. And one could imagine Congress saying to government officials, "You can't talk to your foreign counterparts unless you report to us first." That would cripple American ability to operate in a globalized world.

The real problem is that the left hand often does not know what the right hand is doing. A network of environmental regulators can be harmonizing laws or adopting standards in ways that are quite inconsistent with what a network of trade or antitrust officials might be doing. We won't get the most out of government networks unless they operate with a sense of a more integrated national interest, rather than the interests of the individual officials.

S+B: How would a government leader accomplish that?

SLAUGHTER: Imagine for a minute that we were starting over with the design of a new republic. Instead of already having these massive buildings in Washington, D.C., each a block long and wide, with an entrenched bureaucracy, we could design them from scratch. We would link every official virtually, through sophisticated computer technology, with anyone else in the U.S. government who works on related issues. When a problem came up, we would assemble a flexible task force or team, like they do in the business world.

When they hear things like this, people in government say, "That's the interagency process." But it's not. In that process, each agency decides what it wants and then they try to hammer out a formal structure for solving the problem. In the Princeton Project [on National Security] meetings, Joseph Nye talked about "dual-hatting" people: having them work for two agencies at once to allow them to bridge the different institutional interests and develop working relationships. It's not that hard, but you've got to go a long way in terms of mind-set and even physical architecture. You have to create the kind of virtual architecture — the electronic structures — that can compensate for those massive, closed-off buildings.

The good news is that the next generation of government officials, the kids that we're sending in, are already wired, and they're used to working much more collaboratively. That psychological shift is taking place around the world. Since publishing *A New World Order*, I've been called to talk to foreign ministries in Denmark and Germany.

Traditional diplomats everywhere are trying to figure out their new roles. What do they do, as the official face of the nation, now that there are all of these unofficial faces? Is it enough to convene the players? Do they set the agenda? I think different governments will have different answers.

Insiders and Outsiders

S+B: Do today's government networks include businesspeople?

SLAUGHTER: Some do. The membership of IOSCO, the securities commission network, is fascinating. They have dealers and traders associations along with markets and government securities commissioners. In a way, that has replaced the old structure of lobbying — the old back rooms or marble corridors. Indeed, some NGOs complain that when you move decision making to these remote locations, they can't get in as easily.

We need more systematic research. Is it true that lobbying is moving to networks? And if so, what does that suggest about accountability and governance?

S+B: What's the optimal amount of transparency for government in a networked age? Would you expect to see open-system markups on every piece of legislation?

SLAUGHTER: I hope not. We're ending a period of hyper-secrecy and we're headed for major reforms. But within those reforms, sometimes you need to allow the sausage to be made in the dark. I mean, you can't do any difficult deal making or experimentation when everyone can see everything. And many truly valuable government actions start when people try things that are

politically unpalatable or genuinely experimental. If you can't do that, if the networks are to be universally transparent, then you might as well retain all those old bureaucratic formalized procedures.

That's why I don't agree with [former U.N. Secretary-General] Kofi Annan's statement that global policy networks — with members from the public, private, and non-profit sectors — should be the place where large, complex decisions are made. Instead, I think there should be a clear network of government officials as a central spine of this larger complex of actors — and then it's fine to invite corporate and NGO networks to engage with one another and with the government officials. But keep the policymaking lines clear so we know whom voters can hold to account.

S+B: Has there ever been a model of that kind of accountability and openness at the same time?

SLAUGHTER: David Zaring, at the Washington and Lee University School of Law, has studied the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision. This started with Basel I, a 1988 agreement among central banks (amended in 1996) to require retail banks to increase the amount of capital they had on hand. This had huge repercussions. There are people who think that it directly helped provoke the savings and loan crisis. But whether or not that's true, it certainly focused a lot of attention on the Basel Committee itself, a network of 11 central banks that has long played an important role in regulating the global economy. Not all this attention was good; members of Congress and the academic community started asking questions about why this group of bankers

could make such important decisions without any direct accountability to the people those decisions might affect.

Thus, for Basel II, which is still in progress, the committee developed a new notice and comment procedure. They published their working materials on a Web site, and consulted much more broadly. They asked for comment. No government said that they had to do this, but they understood that their legitimacy and possibly their decision-making structure could be in peril otherwise.

S+B: What do you say to those who think they're being left out of the networks — or think that they'll end up on the losing side because they're not connected to the right people?

SLAUGHTER: This is going to be the hardest thing for the political sphere to deal with. For the longest time, I would get very excited about networks, and I would see people look worried about them, and I didn't understand why. And then finally somebody said, "Look, the only network I know is the old boys' network, and I don't like it." In other words, nearly everyone has a feeling that decisions are being made somewhere else by some informal group. They think, "Those people all know each other; I'm not part of it."

On the global level in particular, many countries feel left out. And this is dangerous. The countries most needed in transgovernmental networks are those that might harbor terrorist cells or have terrible public health systems that could breed pandemics. They are the developing countries that typically do not have either the expertise or the resources to play a role in cur-

rent government networks. We have to think strategically about how to involve them.

The European Union is extending its government networks to the Middle East for precisely this reason. If the United States were to join the E.U. in a kind of transatlantic bridge, giving these informal professional networks a modest degree of formality, suddenly the West would have much more clout. There would be a much bigger incentive for the various governments in the Middle East to cooperate.

S+B: As a business executive, what kinds of changes could I make if I had a better understanding of this new kind of government?

SLAUGHTER: I think executives typically don't think about the way that international relations are organized. They think about the outcomes they want: energy, labor, capital flows. Therefore, when facing a big problem like climate change, they see institutions and processes as window dressing. They don't realize how important it is to create the kinds of institutions that can change the facts on the ground, simply by connecting government officials charged with addressing the problem in different countries and giving them the resources and the authority to look for real solutions.

S+B: So, for instance, the wording of the Kyoto Protocol or Doha agreement turns out to be less important than getting the right people in the room and talking about the issues.

SLAUGHTER: I think so. Already, while the world is still dithering over Kyoto, the governors of different states in the U.S., led by [California] Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, are reaching out to

“The countries most needed in transgovernmental networks are those that harbor terrorists or that could breed pandemics.”

one another and forming trading blocs. They can then also reach out to provinces in Canada and even to cities and provinces in the E.U. and China.

That’s a networked solution that works below the radar of formal international diplomacy. We could take it further by creating a global environmental network, with a few countries deeply involved, and start thinking about solutions. Maybe out of this network a treaty will eventually grow. But it’s better to start by implementing solutions and then let the policy emerge.

S+B: You have a new book this year on America’s place in history. The Princeton Project report was just released. And the importance of government networks is steadily more evident. Where do you think we are at this moment in history?

SLAUGHTER: I think we’re pretty much at a watershed. The world is changing fundamentally on so many different axes at once. Geopolitically, there’s a classic shift of the balance of power from Europe and perhaps the U.S. to China, India, and other emerging nations. Traditionally, the world has rarely accommodated rising powers of that

size without major conflict — and we can’t afford that right now.

Meanwhile, non-state actors are more capable. A small group of terrorists can take out a city; we’ve never seen anything like that before. And the final change is the growing frequency of natural catastrophes and the threat of bacterial resistance.

It’s like moving from traditional chess to a three-level chessboard. What the U.S. does in the next 10 years is absolutely critical, because by 2020 we’re not going to have the options we have now.

I can imagine a world in which the United States leads in a way that restores its legitimacy. We have the ability to bring other nations together very differently from the ways other great powers have done it. I can see us marshaling our technology to create new drugs and cure disease, and to forestall the worst effects of climate change and make a more beautiful world.

S+B: Why is the U.S. so important?

SLAUGHTER: Because, although we’re not as indispensable as we like to think we are, no major geopolitical problem can be solved without strong U.S. leadership. That means both the government

and the American people, but it doesn’t mean the U.S. acting unilaterally. I don’t think the U.S. should lead coalitions. It should lead from behind for a while. But there’s no solution without the U.S. — not in climate change, where we’re the biggest greenhouse gas emitter, in terrorism, or in any other major problem.

And the United States still has the potential to set a unique example of aspiration. When we were riding high in 1961, John F. Kennedy famously said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” That sentiment brought a group of very talented people into government. But now we need the same kind of sentiment more broadly — in corporations, in the nonprofit sector, and in governments around the world. The best leaders in all sectors will follow the model of a statesman, because they can’t meet their goals otherwise. That’s how leadership changes in a highly networked world. +

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