

The Wicked War on Syria: Hillary Clinton in Her Own Words

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How did we get to this point with half the Syrian population (almost 12 million) displaced and under-populated but huge areas of Syria now controlled by ISIS, Al Qaeda (Nusra) and other fanatical fundamentalist groups?

Hillary Clinton's 2014 book [Hard Choices](#) reveals important information about the first years of the Syrian conflict and how we got where we are today. Clinton's account conveys the perception, priorities and bias at the top level of the Obama Administration. It describes policy differences within the administration and the common assumptions and goals which have led to the current disastrous situation.

Clinton's chapter on Syria is titled "Syria: A Wicked Problem". It documents how the US and regional allies tried to overthrow the Damascus government. The "wicked problem" is that there was no easy way. Attack directly? Train proxy army? Supply the armed opposition with weapons secretly or publicly? Apply "No Fly Zone"? Bomb Damascus? These are the questions considered. The dominance of neoconservative mentality in Washington and western media is demonstrated by the fact that foreign demands that "Assad must go" are rarely questioned despite the fact it's in clear violation of international law and the UN Charter.

Clinton's unwillingness to let go of the "regime change" requirement regarding a sovereign state, coupled with a moralistic but biased outrage, suggests someone who does not respect international law and could be dangerous as President: hypocritical, prejudiced and self-righteous.

Following are specific points of interest from “Syria: A Wicked Problem”.

Clinton echoes the western narrative about the Syrian conflict:

“The crisis began in early 2011, when Syrian citizens, inspired in part by the successful peaceful protests in Tunisia and Egypt, took to the streets to demonstrate against the authoritarian regime of Bashar al Assad. As in Libya, security forces responded with excessive force and mass detentions which in turn led some Syrians to take up arms to defend themselves and, eventually, to try to topple Assad.” (p 447)

This description is widespread but misleading. In his 2007 [article](#) Seymour Hersh exposed the U.S. promotion of Sunni fundamentalists to undermine Syria and Iran. In 2010 Secretary of State Clinton pressed Syrian President Bashar al Assad to [comply](#) with Israeli and US calls to stop supporting the Lebanese resistance and break relations with Iran. Was Clinton especially hostile to the Syrian President because he did not comply with her requests/demands and soon after forged an agreement with Iran? She makes no mention of this in her book but it is obviously relevant to the issue of Syria-USA relations.

Regarding the so-called peaceful protesters, in fact there was a violent element from the start. In Deraa in March 2011 several police were killed. In the original “capital of the revolution”, Homs, a very credible eye-witness [reported](#) armed demonstrators initiating the violence.

Clinton confirms the anti-Assad obsession of the Gulf monarchies: *“Sunni countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, backed the rebels and wanted Assad gone”* (p 450).

This presents a baffling inconsistency: If the Syrian uprising was about “freedom and democracy” why was it being heavily promoted by repressive monarchies Saudi Arabia and Qatar?

Clinton was focused on building the anti-Assad forces instead of working toward diplomatic resolution. She recounts: *“As the crisis unfolded, one of the biggest challenges we faced was helping the opposition unite across the country’s many religious, geographic and ideological lines”*. (p 449) In early 2012 she coordinated the cynically named “Friends of Syria” coalition. This was the group of countries hostile to Syria and collectively agreeing how they would support a political front, support an armed insurrection and promote the “activists” fighting for freedom and democracy while on the payroll. At the first meeting in Tunisia in February 2012, as chaos was spreading in neighboring Libya, the “Friends of Syria” discussed the implementation of economic and other sanctions against Syria, training of “Syrian civil opposition leaders”. Clinton records *“behind the scenes there was a lot of talk in Tunis about funneling weapons to the rebels”*. (p452).

Clinton distorts the history in several areas. For example, regarding the [findings](#) of the Arab League mission which toured Syria in December-January of 2011/2 she says *“Arab monitors went to Syria’s battle-scarred cities ...once again it became clear that Assad had no intention of keeping his word. In late January 2012, the Arab League pulled the observers out in frustration and asked the UN Security Council to back its call for a political transition.”* (p 450)

In contrast with Clinton's description, the mission report speaks about the Syrian government's cooperation. The mission wanted to continue but was stopped by the Arab League itself, presumably because the findings were contradicting the policy of the dominant powers in the Arab League.

Among other things, the Arab League mission report documented:

- * violence by rebels against government and civilians including the bombing of a civilian bus;
- * false and exaggerated reports in the international media;
- * pro and anti government demonstrations which were NOT disrupted ;
- * overall Syrian government cooperation and compliance with requests.

Clinton casually dismisses the consequences of the "No Fly Zone" in Libya. The campaign in Libya began with an innocent sounding UN Security Council Resolution calling for the protection of civilians. Both China and Russia abstained rather than voting to veto the resolution. Then they realized they had been tricked. In her book, Clinton describes how Russia "*chafed as the NATO-led mission to protect civilians accelerated the fall of Qaddafi*". In reality the NATO led mission "to protect civilians" resulted in vastly more civilian deaths than had occurred before it began.

[Horace Campbell](#) and [Maximilian Forte](#) have written two solid accounts describing the reality versus myths of regime change in Libya. Clinton's characterization of "accelerating" the fall of Qaddafi is a cynical understatement, like her self congratulatory comment that "we came, we saw, he died" after rebels killed Qaddafi on the street. Many of the refugees drowning in the Mediterannean Sea or reaching the shores of Italy today are a direct consequence of that operation. Yet who has been held to account?

Clinton chastises Russian and Chinese diplomats for not supporting UN Security Council resolutions that place all the blame for the Syrian conflict on the Damascus government while making no demands of foreign states pumping weapons and jihadis into the country. Clinton describes the Russian and Chinese actions as "despicable": "*Are we for peace and security and democratic future, or are we going to be complicit in the continuing violence and bloodshed? I know where the United States standsRussia and China used their veto power to prevent the world from condemning the violence. To block this resolution was to bear responsibility for the horrors on the ground. It was, as I said later, despicable.*" (p 452)

Clinton maintains the public facade that the Obama Administration did not supply weapons in the early years of the conflict. On page 460 she claims "*We provided the rebels with 'nonlethal' aid, including communications gear and rations, starting in March 2012, but we held the line against contributing arms and training.*" This was the public stance but in reality the CIA was heavily involved in transferring weapons to the Syrian armed opposition beginning late 2011. Just as Ronald Reagan and Oliver North used subterfuge to supply weapons to the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1980's, so the CIA and Obama Administration found the perfect way to get weapons to the Syrian opposition without having it recorded or accounted for: they stole weapons from the Libyan military arsenal and shipped them to the Syrian armed

opposition as confirmed in this [declassified DIA report](#).

Clinton documents bad faith involved in early negotiation efforts. The role of Kofi Annan and diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis are discussed. While Annan was trying to get an agreement in the first Geneva conference, Qatar and Turkey were pushing for more military aid to the rebels *“whatever the outcome in Geneva”*. (p 457) While superficially agreeing to drop the demand for ‘regime change’, Clinton indicates that they were still committed to Assad not being part of a post-conflict Syrian coalition government, a major precondition that precludes compromise.

Clinton exalts her effort to ally with General David Petraeus to promote a US supplied and trained proxy army in Syria. Given Petraeus lack of success training Iraqi and Afghan soldiers, he is a curious choice. Clinton describes the White House meetings where she and Petraeus, with the backing of Secretary of Defense Panetta, campaigned for a more direct and aggressive US role:

“Petraeus presented the plan to the President. He listened carefully and had a lot of questions The president asked for examples of instances when the United States had backed an insurgency that could be considered a success....Petraeus and I argued there was a big difference between Qatar and Saudi Arabia dumping weapons into the country and the United States responsibly training and equipping a nonextremist rebel force” (p463).

Clinton describes her disappointment when the proposal was not accepted. Obama deferred the decision at that time. As we now know, a similar plan for the US to “vet” and train “moderate rebels” at a starting cost of \$500 Million was later approved and initiated. The first batch of rebels was quickly routed and captured. In the past couple weeks a second batch of “moderate rebels” defected to Nusra/Al Qaeda as soon as they crossed the border. As for the argument that things have deteriorated because the US did not get more involved earlier, the [August 2012 DIA](#) report is clear: “Internally events are taking a clear sectarian direction. The Salafist, the Muslim Brotherhood and AQI are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria.”

Clinton ignores contradictory evidence around the chemical weapons incident of August 2013. Although she resigned as Secretary of State after the first Obama term office, she was still consulted. Without citing any evidence, she assumes the Assad government was responsible for the CW attack. On the contrary, many of the best American investigative journalists (Seymour Hersh, Robert Parry), retired CIA analyst Ray McGovern and a [dedicated website](#) reached the opposite conclusion. But Clinton sees no problem in a quick determination of guilt. Instead she expresses alarm at the prospect that Congress could vote against authorizing use of force. She describes the planned attack on Syria as a *“limited strike to uphold a crucial global norm”* and expresses fear that Congress might object *“which would deal a serious blow to U.S. prestige and credibility.”* (p466) The thought of Clinton in the White House making life and death decisions, using this kind of value system, is troubling. What kind of credibility and prestige is deserved by a country which attacks another country, killing many, on the basis of questionable or false accusations?

Clinton is blind to the solution. In closing her book, Clinton says *“It is impossible to watch the suffering in Syria, including as a private citizen, and not ask what more could have been done.... Wicked problems can’t paralyze us. We need to urgently seek solutions, however hard they are*

to find.” (p470).

The solution is not impossible. What is wicked is the devastation of Syria by some of the wealthiest and most powerful countries in the world. What is wicked is the justification of this on a “humanitarian” pretense. The solution simply requires countries such as the USA and allies to stop their illegal and destructive efforts to overthrow any government they don’t like. It’s up to the people of Syria to determine their government. It’s time for the United Nations and genuine humanitarian organizations to demand the end of this war so that Syrians can start reconciliation and rebuilding.
