



Hillary Clinton's big criticism of Barack Obama is that he didn't go to war against Syria

By Jason Pye
August 11, 2014

Back in June, Cato Institute Vice President Gene Healy shed some light on Hillary Clinton's foreign policy record. No, we're not talking about her cataclysmic failure in Benghazi or any of her other mistakes during her time in Foggy Bottom.

Healy's warning was that Clinton — throughout the course of her national profile as first lady, U.S. senator, Secretary of State, and, now, Democratic presidential nominee in waiting — has never met a war she didn't like. She helped present the case for the Iraq war and the ties between Saddam Hussein's regime and terrorist elements — ties, by the way, that didn't exist.

More recently, Healy notes, Clinton urged President Obama to intervene in Libya. And, of course, the Obama administration joined the NATO campaign in 2011 to depose the North African country's dictator, Muammar Gaddafi. The intervention in Libya — which is, basically, in the midst of an internal conflict so violent that both the U.N. and the U.S. have evacuated staffers from their embassies — is generally thought to be one of this administration's foreign policy blunders.

Clinton was also supportive of U.S. intervention against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. President Obama, however, didn't take that step, largely due to congressional and public opposition to yet another war.

But Clinton is now criticizing President Obama's approach to foreign policy, an approach she helped craft during in four years as his secretary of state. In an interview with *The Atlantic*, Clinton criticized the White House for not throwing its full weight behind the Syrian rebels fighting Assad's regime:

She made it clear, for instance, that she "advocated" for arming the Syrian rebels but acknowledged there was no way to know with absolute certainty whether it would have made a difference.

"I did believe, which is why I advocated this, that if we were to carefully vet, train, and equip early on a core group of the developing Free Syrian Army, we would, number one, have some better insight into what was going on on the ground," she said.

“Two, we would have been helped in standing up a credible political opposition, which would prove to be very difficult, because there was this constant struggle between what was largely an exile group outside of Syria trying to claim to be the political opposition, and the people on the ground, primarily those doing the fighting and dying, who rejected that, and we were never able to bridge that. ... So I did think that eventually, and I said this at the time, in a conflict like this, the hard men with the guns are going to be the more likely actors in any political transition than those on the outside just talking. And therefore we needed to figure out how we could support them on the ground, better equip them, and we didn’t have to go all the way, and I totally understand the cautions that we had to contend with, but we’ll never know. And I don’t think we can claim to know.”

For what it’s worth, the U.S. has been training the so-called “moderate” rebels who are fighting Assad, and it has been for some time. An Associated Press report from March 2013 notes that the U.S. had been training “secular Syrian fighters” in Jordan “for months now.” The administration denied the report. But a similar report surfaced a few months later. The training of these rebels is still ongoing, according to a recent report from PBS.

The problem with the Syrian rebels is that it’s hard to discern who is friendly to the U.S. There are also reports that moderate rebels and extremist rebels, who are better trained and more organized, were fighting each other.

Clinton’s support for intervention in Syria wasn’t limited to training rebels. She supported air strikes against Assad’s regime, a move that could have devolved into a more lengthy conflict in the Middle East. The American public, however, was opposed to intervention, and the administration backed down.

The trouble for Clinton is that, as she runs away from President Obama, she’s not moving to the Left. In fact, she sounds a lot more like John McCain and Lindsey Graham than Barack Obama, who, despite all of the criticism from the Right, has proven himself to be far too willing to involve the U.S. in conflicts that aren’t any of our business. Clinton is, to be candid, Obama on steroids because, and this goes back to what Healy said, it seems that she almost always defaults to military intervention.