# SYRIA

## 2016ER ATTACKS

**RUBIO INSISTED THAT DESPITE CLINTON’S CLAIMS SHE ADVOCATED FOR ARMING SYRIAN REBELS AS SECRETARY OF STATE, SHE WAS “COMPLICIT IN IMPLEMENTING AND PUBLICLY DEFENDING THE PRESIDENT’S DISASTROUS FOREIGN POLICIES.”**

**Rubio Said He Urged Obama And Secretary Clinton In 2011 To “Intervene Decisively To Oust Assad And To Identify And Arm The Moderate Syrian Opposition.”** “The truth is that, when the Syrian people rose up in 2011 in protest against Bashar al-Assad’s brutal rule, our vital national interest was to prevent a protracted civil war in which radical jihadists from all over the world could rush into a vacuum. If they could seize operational spaces, they could use them to plan and carry out attacks against our allies and ultimately America. In the early stages of this conflict, responsible, bipartisan voices called for U.S. leadership, hoping precisely to prevent the outcome we have now seen play out. I urged Secretary Clinton and President Obama to intervene decisively to oust Assad and to identify and arm the moderate Syrian opposition. Instead, we were told that Assad was a ‘reformer’ and that we should not get involved.” [Marco Rubio, Washington Post, [9/12/14](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/marco-rubio-lets-reject-the-veiled-isolationism-of-obama-and-clinton/2014/09/12/b4e769c0-3780-11e4-8601-97ba88884ffd_story.html)]

**Rubio Attacked Hillary Clinton For Saying She Privately Advocated For A Different Syria Position Than What Obama Pursued: “She And Other Administration Officials Who Found Their Voices Only After They Left Office Were Complicit In Implementing And Publicly Defending The President’s Disastrous Foreign Policies.”** “Some former Obama administration officials, notably Secretary Clinton, have tried to argue that they advocated internally for a different approach, that they saw the train wreck coming. But the fact of the matter is that when they were in positions of responsibility, they failed to prevent the situation that now exists. ‘What are we going to arm them with and against what?’ Secretary Clinton said of the Syrian opposition in 2012. She and other administration officials who found their voices only after they left office were complicit in implementing and publicly defending the president’s disastrous foreign policies — and we’ll be dealing with the consequences for decades to come.” [Marco Rubio, Washington Post, [9/12/14](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/marco-rubio-lets-reject-the-veiled-isolationism-of-obama-and-clinton/2014/09/12/b4e769c0-3780-11e4-8601-97ba88884ffd_story.html)]

## CLINTON DEFENSE

**SECRETARY CLINTON HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS TOUGH AND INFLUENTIAL VOICE IN INTERNAL OBAMA ADMINISTRATION DEBATES WHILE SHE WAS SECRETARY OF STATE**

**Wall Street Journal’s William Galston: As Secretary Of State, “Mrs. Clinton Was Among The Administration’s Toughest Voices During Internal Debates.”** “The only significant difference between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton in 2008 was her vote for the Iraq war, which probably cost her the presidential nomination. Little has changed. During her tenure as secretary of state, Mrs. Clinton was among the administration’s toughest voices during internal debates. She supported the use of American air power in Libya, and the Navy SEAL raid that killed Osama bin Laden. (Both Vice President Joe Biden and Defense Secretary Robert Gates opposed it.)” [William Galston, Wall Street Journal, [7/23/14](http://online.wsj.com/articles/william-a-galston-the-big-2016-foreign-policy-debates-1406071181)]

**SECRETARY CLINTON’S MEMOIR DESCRIBES HER SUPPORT FOR A PLAN TO VET AND ARM MODERATE SYRIAN REBELS…**

**Hard Choices:** **“If The United States Could Train And Equip A Reliable And Effective Moderate Rebel Force, It Could Help Hold The Country Together During A Transition, Safeguard Chemical Weapons Stockpiles, And Prevent Ethnic Cleansing And Score Settling.”** “One of the prime worries about Syria—and one of the reasons it was a wicked problem—was the lack of any viable alternatives to Assad on the ground. He and his allies could plausibly argue, like Louis XV of France, ‘Après moi, le déluge.’ (After Assad, chaos.) The power vacuum in Iraq after the fall of Saddam and the disbanding of the Iraqi Army offered a cautionary tale. But if the United States could train and equip a reliable and effective moderate rebel force, it could help hold the country together during a transition, safeguard chemical weapons stockpiles, and prevent ethnic cleansing and score settling. But could it be done? The key would be thoroughly vetting the rebel fighters to ensure we first weeded out the extremists and then maintained close intelligence sharing and operational coordination with all our partners.” [Hillary Clinton, Hard Choices, 6/10/14]

**Hard Choices:** **The Key To Effectively Arming Syrian Rebels “Would Be Thoroughly Vetting The Rebel Fighters To Ensure We First Weeded Out The Extremists And Then Maintained Close Intelligence Sharing And Operational Coordination With All Our Partners.”** “One of the prime worries about Syria—and one of the reasons it was a wicked problem—was the lack of any viable alternatives to Assad on the ground. He and his allies could plausibly argue, like Louis XV of France, ‘Après moi, le déluge.’ (After Assad, chaos.) The power vacuum in Iraq after the fall of Saddam and the disbanding of the Iraqi Army offered a cautionary tale. But if the United States could train and equip a reliable and effective moderate rebel force, it could help hold the country together during a transition, safeguard chemical weapons stockpiles, and prevent ethnic cleansing and score settling. But could it be done? The key would be thoroughly vetting the rebel fighters to ensure we first weeded out the extremists and then maintained close intelligence sharing and operational coordination with all our partners.” [Hillary Clinton, Hard Choices, 6/10/14]

**…AND HER WORK WITH FOREIGN LEADERS TO ENSURE AN EFFORT TO ARM MODERATE SYRIAN REBELS COULD BE COORDINATED WITH REGIONAL PARTNERS**

**Hard Choices: In Coordinating Syria Efforts, Secretary Clinton Worked With Leaders Of Turkey, Great Britain, France, And Germany To Address Questions Such As “What Would It Take To Impose A No-Fly Zone?...Could We Better Coordinate Support For The Armed Opposition?”** “Although there had been continuous consultations between us and the Turks since the [Syria] conflict started, I thought we should intensify operational planning by our militaries in order to prepare contingency plans. What would it take to impose a no-fly zone? How would we respond to the use or loss of chemical weapons? How could we better coordinate support for the armed opposition? The Turks agreed, and two days later Davutoğlu and I got on the phone to discuss our thinking with the Foreign Ministers of Great Britain, France, and Germany.” [Hillary Clinton, Hard Choices, 6/10/14]

**Hard Choices: Secretary Clinton Pushed “To Begin Arming And Training Moderate Syrian Rebels…[Confident] We Could Put In Place Effective Coordination With Our Regional Partners**.” “Our military’s top brass, reluctant to get involved in Syria, consistently offered dire projections of the forces that would be required to overcome Assad’s advanced air defenses and conduct a Libya-style no-fly zone. But Secretary of Defense Panetta had become as frustrated as I was with the lack of options in Syria; he knew from his own time leading the CIA what our intelligence operatives could do…I returned to Washington reasonably confident that if we decided to begin arming and training moderate Syrian rebels, we could put in place effective coordination with our regional partners.” [Hillary Clinton, Hard Choices, 6/10/14]

**INTERNAL DISAGREEMENTS OVER U.S. SYRIA POLICY DID NOT BECOME PUBLIC UNTIL FORMER DEFENSE SECRETARY LEON PANETTA AND JOINT CHIEFS CHAIRMAN MARTIN DEMSPEY TOLD CONGRESS THEY SUPPORTED A CLINTON-BACKED PLAN TO ARM MODERATE SYRIAN REBELS**

**New York Times: In February 2013, Then-Defense Secretary Panetta And Chairman Of The Joint Chiefs Of Staff Dempsey For The First Time Acknowledged Support For A 2012 “Plan To Arm Carefully Vetted Syrian Rebels…Backed By Hillary Rodham Clinton.”** “[O]n Thursday, deep divisions over what to do about one of those issues — the rising violence in Syria — spilled into public view for the first time in a blunt exchange between Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, and the leaders of the Pentagon. Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta acknowledged that he and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, had supported a plan last year to arm carefully vetted Syrian rebels. But it was ultimately vetoed by the White House, Mr. Panetta said, although it was developed by David H. Petraeus, the C.I.A. director at the time, and backed by Hillary Rodham Clinton, then the secretary of state.” [New York Times, [2/7/13](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/08/us/politics/panetta-speaks-to-senate-panel-on-benghazi-attack.html?pagewanted=all&pagewanted=print)]

**SECRETARY CLINTON CLAIMS TO HAVE RECOMMENDED U.S. AMBASSADOR TO SYRIA ROBERT FORD, WHO PUSHED FOR A PLAN TO ARM MODERATE SYRIAN REBELS**

**Secretary Clinton: “In Early 2010…I Recommended That The President Nominate Robert Ford…As The First U.S. Ambassador To Syria In More Than Five Years.”** “In early 2010, about a year before the maelstrom began in Syria, I recommended that the President nominate Robert Ford, an experienced diplomat who had served across the Middle East, most recently in Iraq, as the first U.S. Ambassador to Syria in more than five years.” [Hillary Clinton, Hard Choices, 6/10/14]

**McClatchy: Syrian Ambassador Robert Ford Spent Years “Agitating From Within A Reluctant Administration To Arm Vetted Moderates To Fight Bashar Assad’s Brutal Regime,” But Ultimately Changed His Mind After Becoming “Increasingly Critical Of [Syrian Rebels] As Disjointed And Untrustworthy.”** “Robert Ford was always one of the Syrian rebels’ loudest cheerleaders in Washington, agitating from within a reluctant administration to arm vetted moderates to fight Bashar Assad’s brutal regime. In recent weeks, however, Ford, the former U.S. ambassador to Syria who made news when he left government service a year ago with an angry critique of Obama administration policy, has dropped his call to provide weapons to the rebels. Instead, he’s become increasingly critical of them as disjointed and untrustworthy because they collaborate with jihadists.” [McClatchy, [2/18/15](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2015/02/18/257024/once-a-top-booster-ex-us-envoy.html)]

**U.S. Ambassador To Syria Robert Ford On Secretary Clinton’s Push To Arm Rebels: “Clinton Understood That The Guys With The Guns Mattered…That It Would Have Regional Implications, And That It Could Become One Large Operating Area For Al Qaeda.”** “For Clinton personally, the engagement of the armed groups was crucial and the White House’s forced policy of pretending that the best way to support the revolution was through the civilian opposition based in Turkey was foolish. ‘Clinton understood that the guys with the guns mattered, not the people in Istanbul, that it would have regional implications, and that it could become one large operating area for al Qaeda,’ said Ford. ‘In 2012 and the start of 2013 the most we could do was to provide help to the civilian opposition. We had no permission from the White House to help the FSA, so we did not do so.’” [Daily Beast, [8/14/14](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/08/14/obama-stifled-hillary-s-syria-plans-and-ignored-her-iraq-warnings-for-years.html)]

**SECRETARY CLINTON CITED THE U.S. FAILURE TO BOLSTER ARMED REBELS IN SYRIA AS A REASON FOR THE GROWING POWER OF JIHADISTS IN SYRIA**

**Secretary Clinton: “The Failure To Help Build Up A Credible Fighting Force” Among The Syrian Opposition “Left A Big Vacuum, Which The Jihadists Have Now Filled.”** “I know that the failure to help build up a credible fighting force of the people who were the originators of the protests against Assad—there were Islamists, there were secularists, there was everything in the middle—the failure to do that left a big vacuum, which the jihadists have now filled. They were often armed in an indiscriminate way by other forces and we had no skin in the game that really enabled us to prevent this indiscriminate arming.” [The Atlantic, [8/10/14](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/hillary-clinton-failure-to-help-syrian-rebels-led-to-the-rise-of-isis/375832/?single_page=true)]

**JOHN MCCAIN HAS REPEATEDLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PRESIDENT OBAMA DECIDED NOT TO ARM SYRIAN REBELS DESPITE SECRETARY CLINTON’S PUSH TO DO SO**

**John McCain On The Syrian Opposition: President Obama’s “Entire National Security Team, Including His Secretary Of State, Said We Want To Arm And Train And Equip These People, And He Made The Unilateral Decision To Turn Them Down.”** “MCCAIN:…I'm astounded that Mr. Carney should say that the Free Syrian Army is now stronger. In fact, they have been badly damaged. CARNEY: That's not what I said, Senator. I said, if I could, sir, what I said is that we know a great deal more about the makeup of the opposition. MCCAIN: Oh, come on, you knew about it -- come on, Jay, we knew all about them then. You just didn't choose to know. I was there in Syria. We knew them. Come on, you guys are the ones -- it's your boss is the one that when the entire national security team wanted to arm and train them, that he turned them down…facts are stubborn things, Mr. Carney. And that is, his entire national security team, including his secretary of state, said we want to arm and train and equip these people, and he made the unilateral decision to turn them down. And the fact that they didn't leave a residual force in Iraq, overruling all of his military advisers, is the reason why we're facing ISIS today. So the facts are stubborn things in history. And people ought to know them. And now the president is saying basically that we are going to take certain actions, which I would favor. But to say that America is safer, and that the situation is very much like Yemen and Somalia shows me that the president really doesn't have a grasp for how serious the threat of ISIS is.” [CNN, 9/10/14]

**John McCain: President Obama** **“Overruled The Senior Leaders Of His Own National Security Team, Who Were In Unanimous Agreement That America Needs To Take Greater Action To Change The Military Balance Of Power In Syria.”** “Mr. McCain said he was dismayed that Mr. Obama had ‘overruled the senior leaders of his own national security team, who were in unanimous agreement that America needs to take greater action to change the military balance of power in Syria.’” [New York Times, [2/7/13](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/08/us/politics/panetta-speaks-to-senate-panel-on-benghazi-attack.html?pagewanted=all&pagewanted=print)]

**WASHINGTON POST’S DAN BALZ CLAIMED THAT SECRETARY CLINTON SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO PUBLICLY STATE DISAGREEMENT WITH OBAMA’S SYRIA POLICY BECAUSE DOING SO MAY HAVE MADE HER “APPEAR DISLOYAL”**

**Washington Post’s Dan Balz: “[A]S A Former Member Of The Administration, Clinton Is Not Exactly A Free Agent…If She Thinks The Administration Should Have Taken A More Aggressive Posture Earlier, She Is Likely To Be Restrained From Saying So, Lest She Appear Disloyal.”** [Dan Balz, Washington Post, [9/4/13](http://www.washingtonpost.com/will-hillary-clintons-position-on-syria-military-strike-affect-2016-presidential-race/2013/09/04/1e3de13c-155f-11e3-961c-f22d3aaf19ab_story.html)]

## 2016ER VULNERABILITIES

**RICK PERRY HAD LIMITED PRAISE FOR SECRETARY CLINTON’S ASSESSMENT OF THE RIGHT COURSE OF ACTION IN SYRIA**

**Rick Perry On Early Intervention In Syria: “I Think On That Issue [Secretary Clinton] Was Closer To Being Right Than She Has Been On Some Other Ones.”** In an article about Texas Governor Rick Perry’s statements on foreign policy in a speech in Iowa, U.S. News and World Report reported: “Asked Tuesday at the Iowa State Fair whether he agreed with the former secretary of state’s assessment that a lack of prior U.S. intervention in Syria emboldened jihadists to penetrate Iraq, the GOP governor of Texas found some daylight with the potential future presidential rival. ‘I think on that issue she was closer to being right than she has been on some other ones,’ he replied.” [U.S. News and World Report, [8/12/14](http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/run-2016/2014/08/12/rick-perry-hillary-clinton-close-to-right-on-syria)]