

U.S. Vilification of Bashar Assad: How to Insult a Potential Ally

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Introduction

Bashar al-Assad was educated as a physician, including training in England as an ophthalmologist. When Bashar's brother, who was groomed to become head of Syria's government, died unexpectedly in an automobile accident in 1994, Bashar became the heir apparent. When Bashar's father died in 2000, Bashar became leader of the Syria government. Bashar's wife, Asma, was born and educated in England — she spent the first 25 years of her life in England. Unlike many leaders of Arab nations, Bashar Assad speaks fluent English, and leads a secular government — making Bashar Assad a potential ally of the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, as well as Western Europe.

In March 2011, during the so-called "Arab Spring" rebellions, Bashar Assad overreacted to some pro-democracy demonstrations in Syria. That overreaction led to swift condemnation by the U.S. Government, including the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and President Obama, as the quotations below show. I remark that it is only for the people of Syria — *not* leaders of foreign governments — to determine who should lead Syria.

After the U.S. Government repeatedly and absolutely declared that Bashar Assad had lost his legitimacy to lead Syria, in mid-2013 something worse than Assad appeared in Syria: the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The Islamic terrorists are *not* in Syria to oppose any alleged misconduct by Assad — ISIL is there to establish its caliphate, Nusra Front to establish an Islamic emirate (Al-Qaeda), and Islamic Front is there to establish Sharia law. Any of these three terror groups — each imposing an extreme view of Sunni Islam on *everyone* — will be much more repressive than Assad's government.

Assad would make a natural ally of Western nations, including the USA, in the fight against Islamic terrorism (e.g., ISIL, Al-Qaeda, jihadists). These Islamic terrorists in Syria threaten Assad much more than they threaten Europe and the USA. And Assad never threatened Europe or the USA. Assad has the best military in Syria, with the possible exception of ISIL. However, the USA had already declared that Assad must be removed from power, so the USA both (1) refused to cooperate with Assad in the battle against Islamic terrorists and (2) refused to negotiate with Assad.

This document collects brief quotations by Hillary Clinton, President Obama, and later John Kerry, in their campaign to vilify Bashar Assad. This is *not* a complete list. I have made more efforts to find and include early quotations from the year 2011, than more recent quotations. Hillary Clinton seems to have developed the dogma that Assad had lost

legitimacy to rule Syria, and then Obama began echoing that same dogma.

Neither Hillary Clinton nor John Kerry are professional diplomats. Clinton served as U.S. Senator from New York State for 8 years before becoming Secretary of State in Jan 2009. Kerry served as U.S. Senator from Massachusetts and served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for 28 years before becoming Secretary of State in Feb 2013. Professional diplomats try to avoid ad hominem attacks, insults, and vilification, because such vulgar techniques are the anthesis of refined diplomacy. Also, times change and one might need to negotiate with someone who had been vilified.

This list of quotations includes those I found in Sep 2013, see my [first essay](#) on Syria at 24 Sep. On 20-21 March 2015, I searched the [U.S. State Department](#) and [White House](#) websites and found more quotations.

I have quoted only a few speeches by Obama or Kerry, because after they leave office, their speeches at U.S. government websites will be moved to a different URL, thereby invalidating all of my links made in March 2015. That is why I have sometimes included links to newspapers and other news media that might have stable URLs.

U.S. Secretary of State 2011-2012: Hillary Clinton

1. [27 March 2011](#) ("Many of the members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe [Asad is] a reformer.") See commentary in [Washington Post](#).
2. [12 May 2011](#) ("QUESTION: Madam Secretary, a question about Syria: Do you think al-Asad has lost his legitimacy as the leader of Syria?
SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, let me say that we have watched with great consternation and concern as events have unfolded under his leadership in Syria, and we are working with our international partners to make as strong a case as possible to sanction those who are leading and implementing the policies that are coming from the government.")
3. [2 June 2011](#) ("... the legitimacy that is necessary for anyone to expect change to occur under this current government [of Syria] is, if not gone, nearly run out. if [Assad is] not going to lead the reform, he needs to get out of the way. Where he goes, that's up to him.") See [Al-Arabiya](#).
4. [11 July 2011](#) ("President Asad [sic] is not indispensable and we have absolutely nothing invested in him remaining in power. Our goal is to see that the will of the Syrian people for a democratic transformation occurs. from our perspective, [Asad] has lost legitimacy, he has failed to deliver on the promises he's made, he has sought and accepted aid from the Iranians as to how to repress his own people,") See [Reuters](#).

5. [15 July 2011](#) ("... that Asad has lost his legitimacy in the eyes of his people because of the brutality of their crackdown")
6. [1 Aug 2011](#) ("As I have said before, President Assad has lost his legitimacy with the Syrian people. Syria will be a better place when a democratic transition goes forward.")
7. [4 Aug 2011](#) ("As I've said before and as others in our government have said, President Asad has lost his legitimacy to govern the Syrian people.")
8. [12 Aug 2011](#) ("President Asad [sic] has lost the legitimacy to lead, and it is clear that Syria would be better off without him.")
9. [18 Aug 2011](#) ("This morning, President Obama called on Asad to step aside and announced the strongest set of sanctions to date targeting the Syrian Government. The transition to democracy in Syria has begun, and it's time for Asad to get out of the way.")
10. [11 Nov 2011](#) ("Our position is clear. We are supporting peaceful transition [in Syria]. Asad has lost his legitimacy to rule, and he should step down.")
11. [29 Feb 2012](#) (At Congressional budget hearing: "And this budget request also will allow us, ..., to help the Syrian people survive a brutal assault and plan for a future without Assad.")
12. [1 April 2012](#) ("... eventually [Assad] has to recognize that he has lost legitimacy")
13. [8 July 2012](#) ("So the future, to me, should be abundantly clear to those who support the Assad regime: The days are numbered; and the sooner there can be an end to the violence and a beginning of a political transition process, not only will fewer people die,")

U.S. President: Barack Obama

The following quotations come from speeches, remarks, press briefings, and statements by President Obama himself, *not* briefings by his Press Secretary.

1. [19 May 2011](#) ("The Syrian people have shown their courage in demanding a transition to democracy. President Assad now has a choice: He can lead that transition, or get out of the way.")
2. 12 July 2011 interview with CBS News: ("Increasingly you're seeing President Assad lose legitimacy in the eyes of his people.")

My comment is that Obama spoke one day *after* Hillary Clinton declared Assad had lost legitimacy. See, e.g., [The Telegraph](#); [Bloomberg](#).

3. [18 Aug 2011](#) ("The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President

Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way. His calls for dialogue and reform have rung hollow while he is imprisoning, torturing, and slaughtering his own people. We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.")

4. [4 Feb 2012](#) ("[Assad] must step aside and allow a democratic transition to proceed immediately. Assad has no right to lead Syria, and has lost all legitimacy with his people and the international community.")
5. [20 June 2012](#) ("And anybody who's seen scenes of what's happening in Syria I think recognizes that the violence is completely out of hand, that civilians are being targeted, and that Assad has lost legitimacy. And when you massacre your own citizens in the ways that we've seen, it is impossible to conceive of a orderly political transition that leaves Assad in power.")
6. [20 August 2012](#) ("I have indicated repeatedly that President al-Assad has lost legitimacy, that he needs to step down.")
7. [20 March 2013](#) ("... I believe that the Assad regime has lost all credibility and legitimacy. I think Assad must go — and I believe he will go.")
8. [16 May 2013](#) ("... we continue to try to mobilize the entire international community to put more and more pressure on Assad so that he recognizes that he is no longer legitimate and that he needs to go, We would have preferred Assad go two years ago; last year; six months ago; two months ago. And there has been consistency on the part of my administration that Assad lost legitimacy when he started firing on his own people and killing his own people, who initially were protesting peacefully for a greater voice in their country's affairs. And obviously that's escalated during the course of time. So the answer [to the question of when Assad should go] is the sooner the better.")
9. [28 Aug 2014](#) ("... it's not just my opinion — I think it would be international opinion — that Assad has lost legitimacy in terms of dropping barrel bombs on innocent families and killing tens of thousands of people.")
10. [10 Sep 2014](#) ("In the fight against ISIL, we cannot rely on an Assad regime that terrorizes its own people — a regime that will never regain the legitimacy it has lost.")
11. [24 Feb 2015](#) ("We'll continue to support the moderate opposition [in Syria], and continue to believe that it will not be possible to fully stabilize that country until Mr. Assad, who has lost legitimacy in the country, is transitioned out.")

U.S. Secretary of State: John Kerry

By the time Kerry became U.S. Secretary of State on 1 Feb 2013, the U.S. Government had already established the dogma that Assad had lost his legitimacy to lead Syria.

1. [28 Feb 2013](#) ("Particularly important to be joined here today by our partners in this endeavor, the Syrian Opposition Coalition. They are the legitimate voice of the Syrian people. And that stands in very stark contrast to the rule of Bashar al-Assad, who long ago lost his legitimacy and who is out of time and who must be out of power.") This was Kerry's first public use of the dogma as U.S. Secretary of State. Note that two years later, the Syrian Opposition Coalition was being ignored by everyone, and President Assad is firmly in control of most of Syria.
 2. [4 March 2013](#) ("Bashar Assad is destroying his country and his people in the process to hold onto power that is not his anymore. The people have made it clear he's lost his legitimacy.")
 3. [14 Oct 2013](#) ("... we believe that President Assad has lost the legitimacy necessary to be able to be a cohesive force, that could bring people together, and that it is clear that in implementing Geneva 1, which is the only purpose for having the Geneva conference now, there has to be a transition government.")
 4. [4 Nov 2013](#) ("As I have said many times before, Assad has lost all legitimacy and Assad must go.")
 5. [24 Sep 2014](#) ("Bashar Assad has lost an ability, not because we say so, but because the facts on the ground tell everybody that when you have killed 200,000 of your own citizens, when you have driven a huge percentage of your population into exile — a million and a half refugees in Turkey, a million and a half or so in Jordan and Lebanon, another four million or so dislocated within your own country, you drop barrel bombs, you gas people, you torture people — how do you imagine having the legitimacy to be able to govern that country?") [CNN](#).
 6. [26 Sep 2014](#) ("As the president has said, Assad lost legitimacy a long time ago.") [Boston Globe](#).
 7. [7 Dec 2014](#) ("As President Obama has said repeatedly, we have no doubt that President Assad has lost all legitimacy....")
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