

What Hillary Clinton Wants to Do in Syria

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton on Thursday urged a tougher approach to fighting Islamic State militants than President Barack Obama has pursued, with an intensified air campaign and more U.S. special forces and trainers.

Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, the former secretary of state offered her most expansive view to date on how to counter a growing militancy that launched attacks in Paris last Friday in which 129 people died.

“Our goal is not to deter or contain ISIS, but to defeat and destroy ISIS,” she said, using a common acronym for the group, in what amounted to an implicit criticism of Obama, who said days before the Paris attacks that it had been contained.

Clinton, who is the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination for the November 2016 election, outlined an approach that is more hawkish than Obama. She said the United States would be prepared to increase air strikes and send more special forces to spot enemy targets and get local forces combat-ready.

However, she opposed deploying large numbers of U.S. troops.

“Like President Obama, I do not believe that we should again have 100,000 American troops in combat in the Middle East, that is just not the smart move to make here,” she said.

“If we’ve learned anything from 15 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan it’s that local people and nations have to secure their own communities; we can help them, and we should, but we cannot substitute for them.”

Clinton said it is time for a “new phase” in the fight against

Islamic State: A more effective air campaign that will “have to be combined with ground forces actually taking back more territory” in the area.

“We should be sending more special operators, we should be empowering our trainers in Iraq, we should be ... leading an air coalition, using both fighter planes and drones,” she said.

Obama has come under heavy criticism in the wake of the Paris attacks for his reliance on air strikes with no capability on the ground to control whatever territory might be cleared of enemy fighters through the use of air power.

“What we have done with air strikes has made a difference, but now it needs to make a greater difference and we need more of a coalition ... flying those missions with us,” Clinton said.

Her speech came a day after Republican presidential candidate Jeb Bush said more U.S. ground forces will be needed in Iraq in the wake of the Paris attacks.

The anti-Islamic State effort will also require an “intelligence surge,” Clinton said, involving more Arabic speakers with expertise in the area and technical assets.

There also should be no-fly zones over Syria and safe zones for people fleeing the violence, she added. These are options that Obama has not taken.

Clinton also said the United States will need help from American private industry to counter Islamic State’s propaganda abilities.

Silicon Valley companies, she said, must not view government as its adversary when it comes to formulating counter-terrorism policies, adding that social media companies can help stop terrorism by “swiftly shutting down affiliated accounts.”

“We need to challenge our best minds in the private sector to

work with our best minds in the public sector to develop solutions that will both keep us safe and protect our privacy,” Clinton said.

“Now is the time to solve this problem, not after the next attack,” she added.

Clinton, who sometimes struggles to relate on the campaign trail, seemed in her element at the Council on Foreign Relations, spoke for an hour, including answering questions.

While parting ways with Obama to some degree, she hewed closely to his decision to resettle as many as 10,000 Syrian refugees as part of the traditional U.S. welcoming role.

Many Republican candidates and more than two dozen state governors have called for a pause in the resettlement program out of fears militants might sneak into the country.

“We cannot allow terrorists to intimidate us into abandoning our values and our humanitarian obligations. Turning away orphans, applying a religious test, discriminating against Muslims, slamming the door on every Syrian refugee: That is just not who we are,” she said. {eo}

(Additional reporting by Amanda Becker, Alana Wise and Caren Bohan in Washington; Writing by Steve Holland; Editing by James Dalglish)

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