

BROOKINGS EXPERT MICHAEL O'HANLON THINKS WE'VE WON OUR RECENT WARS

Fresh off the call from his hero, David Petraeus, to cooperate with al Qaeda, Michael O'Hanlon suggests we should lower the standards for vetting of "moderate" rebels, so we can then partition Syria and pretend we haven't just empowered al Qaeda.

But envisioning a federal arrangement offers the hope that a future peacekeeping force in Syria that could deploy largely along the lines of separation rather than throughout all the major populated areas. That would reduce its needed size and its likely casualty levels. There would surely be violence, and tests of the force – so Americans would have to be part of it, to give it backbone and credibility, but to the tune of perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 troops rather than the 100,000 or more that typified our peak efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, even this kind of deal would require the defeat or near-defeat of both the Islamic State and Assad, given how divisive and illegitimate each has become. So it would only be possible after moderate opposition forces had been strengthened and made much more military headway than they have so far.

This points a path forward. The United States and partners should expand their help for moderate factions, among other things by relaxing the vetting standards that have prevented us from working with anyone who wants to target Assad rather than just the Islamic State. Once somewhat larger moderate forces are

available, and able to establish dependable footholds within Syria, we should send in training teams to work with them in accelerating the recruiting and training of local forces. Such an approach would also allow the much better provisioning of humanitarian relief – an urgent priority recognized by all.

The plan itself is gibberish (and fails for the same reason his other options do: because the US won't want to and cannot enforce this).

But it's all premised on something else – that having an outside power intervene can end wars, including civil wars. To support that claim, he points to ... America's wars in the past 15 years.

A second potential war-ender is an intervention by some outside power, which could side with one party to win it. Beyond the U.S.-led wars of the last 15 years, good modern examples include Tanzania overthrowing Idi Amin in Uganda and the Vietnamese army defeating the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Last I checked, our intervention had reignited a long-simmering civil war in Afghanistan, and started ones in Iraq and Libya. In all those places, those civil wars continue to rage.

Yet those three examples of the US causing a civil war are Brookings expert Michael O'Hanlon's idea of how to end a civil war.