

NO, PAKISTAN WAS THE LAST BIG TEST. AND WE FAILED IT.

"Serious Person" Michael O'Hanlon and escalation surge architect Fred Kagan ended their op-ed with the following words.

There was a time when volatility in places like Pakistan was mostly a humanitarian worry; today it is as much a threat to our basic security as Soviet tanks once were. We must be militarily and diplomatically prepared to keep ourselves safe in such a world. **Pakistan may be the next big test.** [my emphasis]

I'm just a DFH and not a "serious person" or anything. But I am certain they have this wrong—dead wrong. It highlights the problem of neoconservatism—an acute myopia that therefore cannot see a problem until we're already in the thick of it and until they can make an argument—however specious—that the only solution is military.

The way in which O'Hanlon and Kagan conceive of Pakistan "becoming the next big test" is the perfect illustration of this. They describe the events that need to occur for them to take some action—and of course, action is exclusively military.

As the government of Pakistan totters, we must face a fact: the United States simply could not stand by as a nuclear-armed Pakistan descended into the abyss. Nor would it be strategically prudent to withdraw our forces from an improving situation in Iraq to cope with a deteriorating one in Pakistan. We need to think "now" about our **feasible military options** in Pakistan, should it really come to that. [my emphasis]

Note, "could not stand by" ... "should it come to that." They're only considering action **if** Pakistan "descends into the abyss." Otherwise, here we are standing by.

Couple that with their ignorant assertion that, "There was a time when volatility in places like Pakistan was mostly a humanitarian worry," and you see the problem. They would not—and did not—consider action at a time when non-military solutions were the obvious solution to the problem, when AQ Khan and his nukes didn't have us by the nuts. As I said last year when I was earning Matt Bai's wrath, the time to address these problems is **before** they've exploded, while we're still nominally allies. Because we're going to have to do nation-building anyway, whether or not Pakistan falls into the abyss, if we want to prevent its extremists from accruing more power. Had we done it six years ago, when Musharraf took the risk of cooperating with us after 9/11 and when he was begging for a textile trade agreement so he could create jobs, we ignored him. Now, it's going to take a lot more than some textile factories to find a solution to the crisis, peaceful or no.

But O'Hanlon and Kagan apparently can't see that, because they're looking in all the wrong places.