

[Matt Yglesias](#)

Sep 26th, 2009 at 12:58 pm

[Does Helping Hamid Karzai Conquer Afghanistan Stabilize Pakistan?](#)



There's a lot going on in David Brooks' [brief for an ambitious campaign in Afghanistan](#) but there's one piece that I think really needs to be taken apart, namely his contention that "A Taliban conquest in Afghanistan would endanger the Pakistani regime at best, create a regional crisis for certain and lead to a nuclear-armed Al Qaeda at worst." Justin Logan [retorts](#):

This is really cranking it up to 11 on the hyperbole meter. We may recall that in the 1990s *when the Taliban was running Afghanistan*, Pakistan was arguably more stable than it is today.

I think this deserves a more detailed treatment. It seems to me that one of our big issues in Afghanistan is that it's not clear that the Pakistan government wants our side—i.e., Hamid Karzai—to win the war at all. Back before 9/11, they *wanted* the Taliban to run Afghanistan and saw the Northern Alliance as too tied in with Russia and India to serve Pakistani interests. Robert Kaplan wrote [about a year ago](#):

The Karzai government has openly and brazenly strengthened its ties with India, and allowed Indian consulates in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif. It has kept alive the possibility of inviting India to help train the new Afghan army, and to help in dam construction in the northeastern Afghan province of Kunar, abutting Pakistan. All this has driven the ISI wild with fear and anger.

[...] In the mind of the ISI, India uses its new consulates in Afghanistan to back rebels in Pakistan's southwestern province of Baluchistan, whose capital, Quetta, is only a few hours' drive from Kandahar. **When India talks of building dams in Kunar, the ISI thinks that India wants to help Afghanistan steal Pakistan's water. Karzai's open alliance with India is nearly a casus belli for the ISI.** So elements of the ISI have responded in kind; they likely helped in the recent assassination attempt against the Afghan president.

A lot of this reaction seems like ISI paranoia. But the main point is just about the alignment of forces. If

Brooks wants us to believe that ensuring a Karzai victory is necessary for the stability of the Pakistan government, he needs to offer some explanation of why the government of Pakistan doesn't see it that way. Ehsan Ahrari [wrote a good primer on this problem](#) in 2006. For a more up-to-date look at this, I highly recommend the Wall Street Journal's "[India Befriends Afghanistan, Irking Pakistan.](#)" Just note that by "Afghanistan" they mean "Hamid Karzai's government." Pakistan, "irked," doesn't want to see a pro-Indian regime secure control of southern Afghanistan.

The "Af-Pak" linkage is real, but that's the direction it runs—Pakistan's regional concerns about India and Russia undermine our efforts to create a united "pro-American" front against Islamist radicalism in the area. That's a real issue, but it's totally different from the alleged theory that Taliban wins against northern-based warlords undermine Pakistan's stability.

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48 Responses to "Does Helping Hamid Karzai Conquer Afghanistan Stabilize Pakistan?"

1. [Freddie](#) Says:
[September 26th, 2009 at 2:00 pm](#)

And, indeed, even if it is ISI paranoia, if they are convince of it, it's a matter of real politik.

2. [joe from Lowell](#) Says:
[September 26th, 2009 at 2:20 pm](#)

Is there any chance we can just say, "Yo, screw Pakistan," and become openly pro-Indian?

Biggest democracy in the world, and they've sustained it in the face of economic and cultural problems we can barely understand – versus what? A brief interregnum between military dictators?

3. [Don Williams](#) Says:
[September 26th, 2009 at 2:22 pm](#)

1) What the Fuck does David Brooks KNOW about Military Operations OR the people of Aghanistan?

I'm really getting sick of the fucking News Media putting up ignorant shitheads like David Brooks spinning us some line of crap to serve some rich asshole's agenda.

2) Especially when those ignorant shitheads don't DARE talk Honestly about the subject.

Brooks belongs to the faction which told us that Sept 11 occurred "because they hate our