

# Lawfare

## Benjamin Friedman on the Drone Strikes in Pakistan (and the Blair Critique)

by [Robert Chesney](#)

Benjamin Friedman has an [interesting and thoughtful piece](#) at the National Interest this afternoon, commenting on Dennis Blair's recent [criticism](#) of the current approach to drone strikes in Pakistan. One point he makes stood out to me as worth a bit of further discussion, however:

[Blair] never mentions a far more workable way to reduce the need to bomb Pakistan: end war in Afghanistan.

I take it Benjamin means ending *our* part in the war in Afghanistan, or more specifically removing our forces. Whether this would be followed by an end to armed conflict is another matter entirely, but let's assume (very optimistically) that it would be. This would, I think, reduce the need to carry out drone strikes in Pakistan, as Benjamin suggests; surely some percentage of current operation target individuals largely if not entirely because of their connection to hostilities in Afghanistan. But I was motivated to post on this primarily to make the point that even in the rosiest scenario involving a peace agreement in Afghanistan, al Qaeda senior leadership figures would remain in the FATA, as would at least some other individuals who, though not best described as part of al Qaeda, nonetheless have adopted al Qaeda's orientation toward attacking the "far enemy" and who may be responsible for training camp operation in the FATA region. So long as this is the case, and so long as the central government cannot suppress these threats, the motivation for at least some amount of drone strikes in Pakistan—and quite possibly a great many of them—will remain, possibly with little change from the status quo.

It is a different question whether a complete or near-complete withdrawal from Afghanistan might substantially reduce drone strikes in Pakistan simply because of lost capacity to obtain the intelligence that undergirds drone strikes. Having just finished Joby Warrick's riveting book [The Triple Agent](#), with its emphasis on CIA operations in Khost and drone strikes in Pakistan, it's a question that jumps out to me now in any discussion of an Afghan withdrawal. None of which is meant to say that Benjamin meant to say anything for or against these observations in the brief comment quoted above, of course.

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