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ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

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A Lunch with Christine O'Donnell and Her People

By JoAnn Wypijewski

Wilmington, Delaware

I hadn't even collected my name badge for the GOP Unity Reception at Christine O'Donnell's new campaign headquarters in Wilmington this afternoon when a woman in the ladies' room looked at me with deep seriousness and said, "Be careful out there." My mind raced. Were there enemy agents in the hall trying to undermine Christine? Did this woman suspect that I was one of them? I was wearing an awful lot of gray and black. Maybe I was a witch? I didn't have to worry long over this before the woman began to tell me a story, rich in detail and emotion, about how Joe Biden and the Justice Department have been subsidizing rapists through the Violence Against Women Act.

"Four billion dollars... they never prosecute... the records are sealed, they say for the privacy of the women... the corporations are paying men to rape women... the men pay a fine... \$5,000, it's nothing to them... hundreds of thousands of men... the money goes to nonprofits... it's all kept quiet... twenty-five women have been raped in Oxford, Pennsylvania, or that's what I've heard; I know of twelve... some may be dead... I was one of them... They told me to quit my job; quit MY job, why not arrest this man?... The police are in on it... in the town... in the state... the Justice Department said it wasn't their jurisdiction, but it certainly is through the EEOC... I want the word out; you've got to tell the women... Joe Biden is subsidizing rapists."

She was a small, taut figure, with a sparkly white sleeveless turtleneck and a long rope of hair trailing down one side almost to her waist; middle aged, agi-

WYPIJEWSKI CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Success is Not An Option

Obama's Afghan Disaster

By Patrick Cockburn

Islamabad

The U.S. is making a somewhat desperate attempt to close down the Afghan Taliban's bases on the Pakistani side of its 2,500km-long border with Afghanistan. The U.S. military's hope of a year ago that a surge in troop numbers inside Afghanistan would turn the tide in the guerrilla war is fading fast. The Taliban have extended their grip in the north and west of the country. The one option left to America and its allies is to try to force the Pakistan army to act decisively against the Taliban in Pakistan.

It is not going to happen. The Pakistan military has become adept over the past decade at outmaneuvering Washington on this issue. The Taliban were very much Pakistan's creation in the 1990s, though the relationship has been more distant since 9/11. The army has no interest in putting the Taliban permanently out of business and, thereby, lose Pakistan's main lever over America.

It is reasonable enough for Pakistan to claim that it could not close the Afghan-Pakistan frontier that runs through some of the toughest terrain on earth and is the same distance as between London and Moscow. If the U.S.A., with its massive airpower, cannot shut its side of the border, how come the Pakistani army is expected to be more effective on the Pakistani side? Whatever the direct role of Pakistan in sustaining the insurgency in Afghanistan, the bottom line is the same for the U.S. and its allies now, as it was for the Soviet Union in the 1980s. So long as the border with Pakistan remains at least partly open, the insurgents cannot be defeated.

Pakistan recently highlighted the hold it has over the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan by stopping their supply

trucks from crossing the Afghan frontier. The ban was in retaliation for U.S. helicopters making an attack on the Pakistani side of the border and killing three Pakistani soldiers.

One comic aspect of Pakistan shutting down NATO's supply line through the Khyber Pass is that the Taliban themselves may not be too pleased to see the ban go on for too long. A senior Pakistan officer told me last week in Islamabad that he reckoned the Taliban received a large part of the \$1,500 protection money, paid by trucking companies for every one of the 1,000 or so trucks entering Afghanistan each day with supplies for U.S. and NATO forces. This type of extortion may be as important to the Taliban's revenues as the heroin trade.

Local bandits have also been happy beneficiaries of the 80 per cent of supplies for foreign forces in Afghanistan, which come through Pakistani ports and are then driven north to the border. These are supposedly nonlethal goods such as fuel, spare parts, and clothing. But raids on warehouses in Peshawar by Pakistani security a few days ago discovered two NATO helicopters, waiting for a buyer. Locals tell with some merriment of another looted container that turned out to be entirely filled with whisky bottles. Religiously inclined bandits briefly thought of destroying the cargo, but were swiftly convinced by fellow villagers that it would all be sold to non-Muslims.

British Prime Minister David Cameron, during his trip to India several months ago, accused Pakistan of aiding the Taliban, and was subsequently criticized for his lack of diplomacy. In this minor row, the point was lost that the Pakistan and the Afghan insurgency are

COCKBURN CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

COCKBURN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

effectively joined at the hip. The Pakistani army may squeeze the Taliban, but it will never squeeze them to death as the Americans want.

It will not do so because the Afghan Taliban are popular in Pakistan. Most Pakistani soldiers I spoke to were happy to fight the Pakistan Taliban, whom they denounced as parasitic on the reputation of their Afghan equivalents. They see the latter as Pashtun freedom fighters combating a foreign occupation and battling for a share in power against their non-Pashtun rivals, such as the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazara. A Pakistani colonel commanding Pashtun troops on the border wondered how American and British troops could conciliate Pashtun villagers since "xenophobia is at the heart of Pashtun culture."

A second reason why the Pakistan military is unlikely to attack the Taliban is that we may be seeing the opening moves in the endgame in Afghanistan. The four main players are the U.S.A., the Afghan government, the Taliban, and Pakistan. If the Pakistani army plays its cards right, then the outcome of any successful peace negotiations would be a power-sharing government in Kabul, in

which the Taliban would play an important role. The Pashtun provinces would come under substantial Taliban control. Pakistan, with its strong influence over the Taliban, would be established as a regional power.

The American drone attacks on North Waziristan are at a level higher than at any time since they started in 2004. The killing of senior members of al-Qaeda is triumphantly announced. But the border areas of Pakistan-Afghanistan are an unlikely area from which to mastermind a plot to bomb targets in Europe. There are checkpoints on all the roads in and out of the area. Strangers are very

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closely watched. Jihadi fighters are much more likely to make their way overland to Somalia.

The mess, which is American and British strategy in Afghanistan, is exemplified by the ease with which the supplies of their forces can be choked off by Pakistan. The Pakistani army, which controls foreign and security policy in the country, is not going to kill off the Taliban at the request of the U.S. The Hamid Karzai government has less support than the communists at the time of the Soviet military withdrawal in 1988. The U.S.A. and Britain are politically weak, because they have such a feeble Afghan partner in Kabul, and militarily weak because they cannot shut the Pakistan border. They have no choice but to negotiate. **CP**

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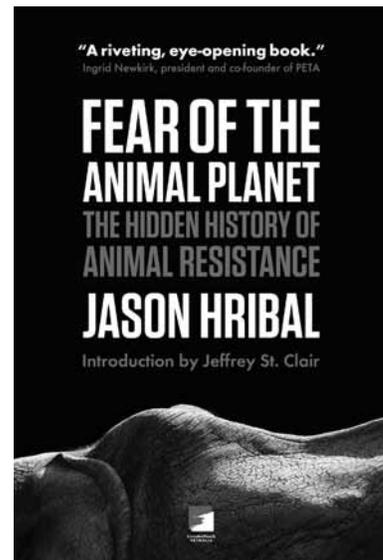
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