

# CounterPunch

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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-

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## 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

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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**

**Patrick Cockburn** is the author of *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq*. He can be reached at [patrick.cockburn@attglob-al.net](mailto:patrick.cockburn@attglob-al.net)

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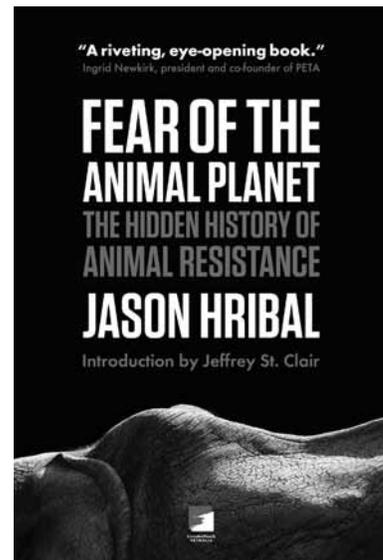
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tated, bandy arms shaking as she spoke. I felt I should soothe her, but that seemed futile. She was on automatic, with no apparent low setting. Oxford is a cesspool, she said, controlled by the Ware family.

“Look up this name, John C. Ware, W-A-R-E.” Ware is, indeed, the son of a prominent and wealthy family in nearby southeast Pennsylvania, named after his grandfather, who was a Democratic congressman in the 1970s. His father was in local politics for years. Ware the Younger, a Democratic committeeman and former schoolteacher, was arrested this summer on sex charges involving three teenagers. “You don’t know,” this woman said, backing into a corner to steady herself. What followed was a rapid-fire resume of beastliness and corruption; a whirl of names, rapists and their protectors, a summer camp, an annual convention of sadomasochists allowed to run wild and naked in public, children raped and killed, “burned alive in the streets!”

I really didn’t come to this lunch looking for damage. I had written to the O’Donnell camp a week earlier asking to be put on a press list for alerts on the candidate’s public schedule, and had heard nothing back. This is standard procedure for the O’Donnell campaign; local political reporters told me they can get virtually nothing out of Team Christine and have been fielding requests like mine from other out-of-town journalists simply trying to follow the campaign. But I had also typed my name and email address into the section of the website asking the plain people to sign up for more information. And so, the grassroots side of the campaign kicked in, and I was invited to lunch.

It wasn’t so much a lunch, actually – some cut-up sub sandwiches and sodas at the back of a long room – as a gathering of the Republican tribe around their new princess. The rest of the candidates were frogs: gray men, puffed up, or spindly and smirking, the type of Republicans who watched their party lose everything beginning in 2006 and now see their advantage in the perky miss with the million-dollar smile. Jostling to adjust themselves to the party’s new power base, the men called her “a true Reagan Republican,” and outlined their own dreams of low taxes and no regulation as if they’d been in personal colloquy with the shade of

the Gipper (before he was forced to raise taxes). The Congressional candidate Glen Urquhart, a real estate executive with a miserly little grin and establishment bonafides to match, assured the crowd that he’d just been talking to former Governor Du Pont and “he gets the Tea Party... he even quoted Sarah Palin.”

I tried to imagine the horn-rimmed Huguenot, a lifetime of privilege cushioned by centuries of extraction and pelf, polished at Exeter, Princeton, Harvard Law – all of that suspended for a moment’s condescension to the Volk. “You betcha!” Du Pont was said to have said. Some in the crowd laughed and clapped

**“The police are in on it... in the town... 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.”**

hearing this. It doesn’t really matter if Du Pont is a phony. O’Donnell’s backers, those here anyway, aren’t as ideologically pure as they are always portrayed. They understand that the prime objective of electoral politics is to win. It doesn’t matter if Urquhart is a phony; here he was bowing to Christine O’Donnell in her campaign’s big new office, with a couple of dozen desks and meeting space for many more volunteers, paid for with some of the millions of dollars that have flowed her way since her primary victory of September 14.

Mike Castle, savaged in that primary as an “unmanly” Obama-loving fake Republican, would be embraced in an instant if he now endorsed Christine. A retired woman in an O’Donnell T-shirt, a registered Independent who swooned at the memory of JFK, told me she thought it was awful that Castle hadn’t made the traditional, gentlemanly gesture of endorsing his erstwhile opponent. An about-face seems highly unlikely. During

the campaign one of O’Donnell’s former staff members made an Internet video that was ostensibly about the political issues until a hurriedly asked question revealed its true purpose. “Isn’t Mike Castle cheating on his wife with a man?” – an off-camera female voice asks, to which the young woman on camera laughingly replies with a shake of her pretty head and a knowing glance, “That’s the rumor.”

“I love the way they say, ‘Well, there’s a rumor,’” an infuriated Castle told the local press in the first interview after his defeat. “Who made up the damned rumor, for God’s sake?” Throwing the rock, then hiding the hand, O’Donnell said at the time that she had nothing to do with the video but then repeated the “rumor” twice on the hustings herself. It was all just girlish fun, like something hatched at a high-school sleepover, or in the green room before one of her old television appearances, when excited talk of anal sex and “getting away with perversion” was always good for a bounce. The woman who’d been hoping Castle would come around acknowledged that the “rumor” business wasn’t too admirable.

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"But you know, those rumors are around," another retiree chimed in, this one an ex-Democrat, whose grown-up children are fiery Tea Partyists instructing their aged mother on the creeping signs of socialism that everywhere abound. "Did you know Obama began his career in the living room of Bill Ayers?! Did you know his mentor in Hawai'i was a communist?!"

Urquhart had told the crowd, "This is America! We don't want it to become Europe." Europe is a disaster, he said. "Do you want 20 per cent unemployment and riots in the streets?" It sounded almost as bad as Oxford, Pennsylvania. Odd, I thought, that he offered Canada as a more alluring model. Sensing the crowd's impatience for the afternoon's main attraction, he didn't take the time to indulge in the pretzel logic that would have been necessary to square his admiration for that country's experience at lowering its debt ("We can do it, too!") with the right's bedrock allegiance to the U.S. war machine and hatred for Canadian-style socialistic single-payer.

At last Christine took center stage, and, with the bar set so low, how could she not be adorable? She smiled winningly and must have said "thank you" half a dozen times; in fact, that's almost all she did say. She brought a young man up to the front to highlight the reason she's in this race: a boy worried he might lose the family farm if his father kicks off and the damned death tax shatters all his dreams. "You shouldn't be worried about such things; that's for us to worry about. You should be worried about going out with girls!" O'Donnell vowed to eliminate the inheritance tax entirely, to hurrahs from the middle-class audience that never need worry about it. She thanked the volunteers again, thanked her office's new neighbors, Bancorp and Swift Financial, for being so welcoming and such inspirations of can-doism, and urged everyone to have a sandwich and some cookies.

Afterward, to a reporter she said she didn't support cutting Social Security benefits and wasn't sold on the idea of private accounts, but would consider raising the retirement age. She fended off a couple of pesky questions about her campaign financing, disarming the reporter with a joke, and then mingled with her people. It's clear why they like

her. A good-time girl gone pure, at ease with her big butt and mismatched separates, casually pawing her knotted ropes of pearls and letting her hair fall free, O'Donnell looks like she feels good – wholesome, solid, simple and fun, everything the country is not and her people wish it were. Pretty but unthreatening, not suited up self-consciously like Hillary Clinton or, in a different register, Sarah Palin, she, above all, seems so nice. It doesn't matter if she is or not. Ronald Reagan wasn't nice or consistent or honest or good, and he is her closest apparent model.

Moving around the room, spreading warmth and saying nothing, she dispelled for a time the madness bearing her forth like a wave. The woman I had met in the ladies' room seemed almost calm with her hand held between O'Donnell's. The man with "Mark The Patriot" scrawled

**O'Donnell said she didn't support cutting Social Security benefits and wasn't sold on the idea of private accounts, but would consider raising the retirement age.**

hugely on his shirt in Magic Marker seemed almost normal. Outside I saw his truck, a Ford 4x4 jacked up on giant wheels, which he has been driving around the country like some latter-day town crier since October of 2008. The original printed sign on the back, "To: Obama And Democrat Fools," warning that "over my dead body will you steal my freedom, my religion, my money, or my guns!" is a little faded now, but it has been augmented with hand-lettered slogans – "Save America," "Obama is half white, half foreign, and all wrong for America!" The truck's tinted windows bear the waxed dictums of the day, "Live Free or Die Hard. We the People. Angry Mob on Board." CP

JoAnn Wypijewski is traveling across America, sending reports to *CounterPunch*. She can be reached at [jwyp@earthlink.net](mailto:jwyp@earthlink.net)

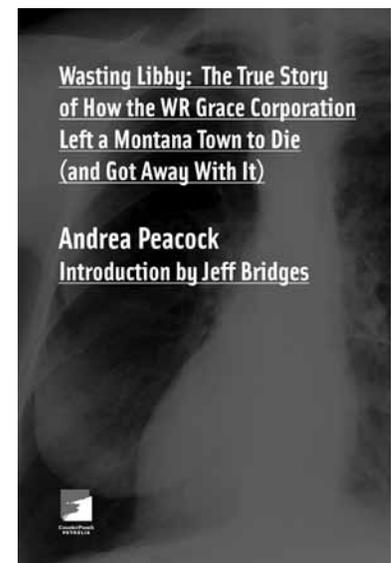
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# The Battle for Moscow

By Boris Kagarlitsky

*Moscow*

After the forced resignation of Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov, fired by President Medvedev last month, the ensuing commentaries by political experts in Moscow resembled a post mortem of some scuffle in a children's sandbox, focused on who offended whom and who started it first. Naturally, both the Russian and Western press have published a lot of Kremlinological nonsense, pointing to Medvedev's personal concern about the fate of the Khimki forest which provoked a later conflict with Luzhkov; they speculate about rivalry between Medvedev and Putin. However, the conflict in Khimki has been going on for three years and attracted no interest on the part of the president, though these events were quite public and scandalous. The same can be said about relations between two leading figures in the Russian state, Medvedev and Putin. Though their relations have not been without problems, nothing shows that there is any political disagreement between them. Amid other banalities, the experts conspicuously evade the prime issue, which concerns the matter of money and private material interests. People stubbornly pretend that they do not live in a capitalist system, while the federal government's TV channels drench them in stories of the staggering corruption which saturates Moscow at every level. The most conspicuous feature of these exposes is that they are being broadcast by the same media that not so long ago denied the true situation or ignored it entirely. Does anyone want to ask: why are we getting these disclosures now?

The current battle for power in Russia's capital city has been sparked by the coincidence of crises at both the local and federal levels. It's not because, during Luzhkov's 18-year reign as mayor, his wife, Elena Baturina, has become one of the richest women on the planet. Baturina's business is no more than a colorful symbol of a larger reality. For nearly two decades, Luzhkov and the Moscow City Council oversaw a vast construction empire, tied in with banks, real estate operators and a bureaucracy some of whose functionaries became shareholders in certain favored companies. Moscow's

construction program not only developed in perfect isolation from the needs of the city, but grew to such a degree that it actually obstructed the real processes, structures, needs and capacities of the urban economy.

The dizzying pyramid of speculative capital was sustained only by constant credits and fresh injections of funds from the city budget. As in any financial pyramid, the need for additional capital is voracious and endless. The massive destruction of Moscow's historic buildings should not be ascribed to Mayor Luzhkov's bad taste, but to the need to constantly clear space in the heart of the

**When the Kremlin seizes the financial cash flows, redirecting them for national needs, Muscovites will feel an acute nostalgia for the prosperity of Luzhkov's time.**

city for ever more expensive construction projects. The less cost-effective and efficient these projects were, the greater was the need to launch new, even more grandiose ones. As a result, the infrastructure of Russia's capital declined at an accelerating tempo against a background of rapid road construction, which not only failed to solve the problem of traffic jams, but, on the contrary, owing to the unsystematic character of the road building, made them worse.

If the financing of the Moscow pyramid stops, the inevitable crash will follow, the victims of which will be not only Elena Baturina and her corporation, Inteko, but many other companies as well. Unfortunately, however, money is needed not only for the capital's mayor. An urgent need to plug the financial gap had also emerged at the federal level.

This summer's fires and drought made it clear that attempts to keep the fiscal deficit under control are doomed to failure, unless there is serious real-

location of resources across the entire Russian business sector. And, first of all, in Moscow. Pressure from the federal authority on the Moscow mayor's office was inevitable. For their part, the mayor and his team, amid compounding economic crisis, have appeared unexpectedly obstinate. The issue, again, is not Yury Luzhkov's personality, but the objective situation of Moscow's prime business powers. There is no safe haven against the storm. Ahead lies bankruptcy.

In launching their war on Luzhkov, the federal authorities made a fatal mistake at the very outset, deciding to force the mayor to capitulation by means of a propaganda onslaught. But the mayor's office was not shaken by these TV exposes because there were no accompanying administrative sanctions following these documentaries. The failure to back propaganda with punitive action only demonstrated the central government's weakness and indecision. Deploying its various representatives and experts, the federal authority suggested Luzhkov to resign voluntarily, but the mayor responded with a contemptuous refusal followed by a few precise, well-calculated blows. On his side, Luzhkov mobilized the metropolitan organization of the United Russia Party, thus demonstrating the actual collapse of the multiyear effort to create a pro-Kremlin party of power. The most varied figures – from the leader of the Communists, Gennady Zyuganov, to the capital's chief rabbi, and from the official trade union bosses to the Nizhniy Novgorod governor, Shantsev – have started to offer Luzhkov up-front or more circumspect support.

President Medvedev and his administration found themselves in an extremely awkward position. In every possible way, they tried to finesse Luzhkov's blatant resistance, but the mayor's obduracy left them no option. Even worse, it has become clear that if, after all that has happened, Luzhkov remained as a mayor, nobody will take the Kremlin seriously anymore. At last, on September 28, president Medvedev signed the long-awaited decree about the dismissal of the mayor from his post, in connection with "a loss of confidence." Everything has been done in strict accord with the letter of our country's laws: no one requires any other reason for the official dismissal or even an explanation of it. However, it would be naive to believe that this af-