

World Focus – October 15, 2017

Matthew Hoh

Friends, we have some important news this morning. Jimmy Carter has offered to meet with Kim Jong-un to avoid a new Korean war. This comes to us by way of Reader Supported News, a very credible organization that has done so much to break through any news blockade that may exist. The point they're making is that:

“Former US President Jimmy Carter has expressed a desire to visit Pyongyang to serve as an emissary between the US and North Korea, Park Han-shik, an emeritus professor of international affairs at the University of Georgia, said Sunday.

Park told Korea JoongAng Daily in a phone interview that “Carter wants to meet with the North Korean leader and play a constructive role for peace on the Korean Peninsula as he did in 1994.” Park, a prominent scholar of North Korea-related issues who has traveled to Pyongyang over 50 times, visited 93-year-old Carter, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his work with the Atlanta-based Carter Center, at the former president’s home in Plains, Georgia, on Sept. 28. “Should former President Carter be able to visit North Korea, he would like to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and discuss a peace treaty between the United States and the North and a complete denuclearization of North Korea,” Park said, “and contribute toward establishing a permanent peace regime on the Korean **Peninsula.**”

Friends, this is an alternative to killing 72 million people and polluting the air of the planet. So which is better - to have a former president visit North Korea, or to kill 72 million people in some kind of horrible holocaust?

“During the peak of the North Korean nuclear crisis in 1994, when the U.S. military under President Bill Clinton drew up plans to strike a nuclear reactor in Yongbyon, Carter traveled to Pyongyang in June that year to defuse tensions and reached a deal with then-leader Kim Il Sung for North Korea to freeze its nuclear program.

Kim died a month later on July 8 and was succeeded by his son Kim Jong-il, the father of the current leader.

Then in October, the United States and North Korea adopted the Agreed Framework, under which North Korea would freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear program, addressing Washington's concerns about its plutonium-producing reactors and Yongbyon nuclear facility. In turn, North Korea was promised fuel oil and assistance in the construction of two light-water reactors.

Now, 23 years after he played a decisive role in resolving the last nuclear crisis, Carter has strong resolve to mediate between the two countries once again, Park said.

The professor added it was why Carter has publicly raised the need for a U.S. government delegation to visit North Korea and convince the regime to give up its weapons program.

In an Oct. 4 opinion piece in The Washington Post, Carter described the "strong possibility of another Korean war" as "the most serious existing threat to world peace," and wrote that it was "imperative that Pyongyang and Washington find some way to ease the escalating tension and reach a lasting, peaceful agreement."

The former president pointed out that North Korean officials have always demanded direct talks with the United States as well as a permanent peace treaty to officially end the 1950-53 Korean War, which technically concluded in a cease-fire.

"They want an end to sanctions, a guarantee that there will be no military attack on a peaceful North Korea, and eventual normal relations between their country and the international community," Carter wrote.

Other options to resolve the crisis, such as military strikes on the North's nuclear facilities, more severe economic punishment or an end to joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea, do not "offer an immediate way to end the present crisis, because the Pyongyang government believes its survival is at stake," he wrote.

Carter went on to call U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's statement that Washington has lines of communication with Pyongyang "a good first step to defusing tensions."

The next step, he wrote, would be for the United States to offer a "high-level delegation" to visit Pyongyang for peace talks, or support an international conference that includes the two Koreas, the United States and China.

Although Carter did not explicitly suggest himself as an envoy to North Korea in his opinion piece, Park said he conveyed the former president's wish to head such a U.S. delegation to the country through informal channels with North Korea.

Park previously helped to arrange Carter's visit to Pyongyang in 1994 and 2010. However, North Korea has yet to respond."

You'll also see in the Washington Post an article by Jimmy Carter, *What I've Learned About North Korea's Leaders*. Friends, here's an option for peace that is sane. The other option is *insane*, and we do not care to choose insanity whether it comes from the president of the United States or anywhere else.

We've invited onto World Focus - for the fourth time - someone who's very knowledgeable about war. It has been very helpful to have Matthew Hoh with us on several programs now. Matthew Hoh is a Senior Fellow at the Center for International Policy and is the former Director of the Afghanistan Study Group, a network of foreign and public policy experts and professionals advocating for a change in US strategy in Afghanistan. A former State Department official, Matthew resigned in protest from his post in Afghanistan over US strategic policy and goals in Afghanistan in September 2009. Prior to his assignment in Afghanistan, Matthew served in Iraq; first in 2004-5 in Salah ad Din Province with a State Department reconstruction and governance team and then in 2006-7 in Anbar Province as a Marine Corps company commander. When not deployed, Matthew worked on Afghanistan and Iraq policy and operations issues at the Pentagon and State Department from 2002-8. Matthew's writings have appeared in the Atlanta Journal Constitution, Defense News, the Guardian, the Huffington Post, USA Today, the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post. The Council on Foreign Relations has cited Matthew's resignation letter from his post in Afghanistan as an Essential Document. In 2010, Matthew was named the Ridenhour Prize Recipient for Truth Telling. Matthew is a member of the Board of

Directors for Council for a Livable World and is an Advisory Board Member for Expose Facts (exposefacts.org). He writes on issues of war, peace and post-traumatic stress disorder recovery at matthewhoh.com.

Welcome, Matthew Hoh.

Matthew: Thanks, Blase. Thank you for having me on.

Blase: Thank you for being here. Had you heard Carter's announcement?

Matthew: No, this is the first I heard about it.

Blase: Well, Reader Supported News reported this and of course they are very credible. Professor Park is very credible; he's been one of the most knowledgeable academics on North Korea. Here Carter is saying he'll be happy to go. We'll have a conference and solve this. And Jimmy is right. He ended the war in Argentina, the dirty war. As ex-president, he was called down there by the Argentines so they could thank him for ending that rotten war. He did it himself, and he has been a great peacemaker and perhaps - without a doubt, really - the greatest ex-president in our history. John Quincy Adams, who went back to the congress after serving as president, so he could work to end slavery - he's another. So we have this hero, Jimmy Carter, offering to end this rather than kill 70 million people.

Matthew: Certainly this is within the sphere of what Jimmy Carter does, so I have no reason to doubt the reports. I think back, when I hear things like this, about what the establishment in Washington DC will say about such an offer by President Carter, or just generally the idea of ending this war in Korea and demilitarizing our presence there, as well as trying to establish better relations between North Korea and other nations in the world. And I think a lot back to when I was in high school in the late 80s (I graduated in 1991) and I remember very well the establishment's view on the Soviet Union and on East Germany and Poland and the rest of the eastern bloc, as it was called, the countries in the Warsaw Pact, and how it was impossible for us to believe that the people who are running the government there might have genuine impulses to de-escalate the tensions and the conflicts in the Cold War. Our knowledge of what was occurring on the other side of the famed Iron Curtain was so poor, was so lacking in real detail and accuracy and certainly the interpretation [of that incomplete and inaccurate

information] was completely off many times. This goes as well more recently with Iraq. I was involved quite extensively in that war, and I think about most recently the book that came out from the man who was the US's, the CIA's, top Saddam Hussein expert. And his book, published in the past year, basically says we didn't know anything about the Iraqi government or Saddam Hussein. We didn't even understand how the country ran and what the politics were like. So this strikes me as something very similar in the Korean Peninsula. We really don't have a good idea of what the North Koreans want, of what their lives are like and what their aspirations are, and we're guided by the establishment doctrine on North Korea.

Blase: You know, the same is true with Iran back in 53 and 54. Mosadegh was elected and was extremely popular. Because he would not privatize the oil, guess what he was called? A madman. He was not a mad man. And guess what we are calling the head of state in North Korea. A mad man. Apparently anyone is a mad man who differs with our goals and objectives. This is not a way to conduct diplomacy. So we have that intervention, shortly after WWII, and then the intervention in Guatemala in 1954 in which we replaced an excellent, democratically elected president with a public relations man for the United Fruit Company who was entirely useless as a president. So this is just a repeat of history. There are so many things, Matthew, that I know we'd like to review with you today. Time and again I've seen little charges here and there of the United States working together with ISIS and Israel, and I didn't get a handle on it until I saw some of your comments coming from the Institute of Public Accuracy. That of course is from the press club in Washington, DC. Would you have any comments on that?

Matthew: Yes, and my comments were informed by allegations that are coming from the former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai. He was put in power in 2001 and maintained in power for over a decade. His allegations are that the US is operating with the Islamic State in Afghanistan, supplying them by helicopter and various other things. That sounds little far-fetched to me. However, I've been involved since the start of these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. You know, we killed a million Iraqis with our sanctions and bombings in the 1990s. And certainly the Afghans have been at war since the 70s, much of that inspired by American involvement. Nothing would surprise me at this point, in terms of what we've seen occur, what has happened, and our history. You look at what we've done this century and both the 20th and 19th centuries, with what our government has done and who we've allied ourselves with. But the importance of understanding these allegations is to understand the base-level truth that is the creation of the Islamic State, which is the grandchild of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq in

2003. The child of that was, of course, Al Qaeda in Iraq. Al Qaeda did not have a presence in Iraq. Al Qaeda was in Kurdistan, in northern Iraq, but that region was autonomous and protected by American air power from Saddam Hussein's reach. When we invaded and occupied, we brought this group into Iraq. Zarqawi allied himself with Al Qaeda and became a subsidiary, or franchise, of Al Qaeda, pledging loyalty to Bin Laden. And that group had enormous success in helping instigate civil war in Iraq, and that again was a result of our invasion and occupation and caused the deaths of over a million Iraqis since 2003.

That group enjoyed success when the Syrian war was started. The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, and which we know from documentation by journalists as well as from what American officials, including Vice President Biden, have said, the Syrian civil war, whatever its initial roots in a legitimate uprising among the people, quickly became an arm of American foreign policy. The United States funded organizations, including Al Qaeda's allies in Syria, called the Al Nusra Front at that time, and Al Qaeda in Iraq, which had changed its name to Islamic State in Iraq.

Once the Syrian civil war began, they changed their name to ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. We, the United States, either directly through the Pentagon and CIA, or indirectly through our allies the Saudis, Qataris and Turks, funded and supplied ISIS, provided intelligence and support - for example, all those white pick-up trucks you see the Islamic State driving around in, the new Toyota pick-up trucks, those weren't just bought off a lot in Syria. Those were provided to the Islamic State by the United States' allies at the behest and with the knowledge of the American government.

That has happened for years. We see, again, whether its leaked documents from the Defense Intelligence Agency, whether it's statements by American officials, either Hillary Clinton's people talking about how we're going to take weapons from the war in Libya - a war of American involvement - and send them to Syria. They called that the "bank shot;" that's the term we used for it at the time, the bank shot of taking weapons and fighters from Libya and transferring them to Syria. Or, again, as other officials like Biden who clearly stated that the Saudis, Qataris, the Turks were funding the Islamic State and other terror groups in Syria with hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollar. The US went along with it. At the same time, and this is one of the most staggering things, we imagined that this imaginary line of order between western Iraq and eastern Syria actually really existed, and we were going to use the Islamic State and Al Qaeda and these other jihadi, Islamic extremists groups to take Bashar Assad

and his government out of power in Syria. But across this line in the middle of the desert there that separates the two countries, we were going to control them and keep them in check and in this way keep Maliki's government in Baghdad in power. And of course that completely backfired, it blew up, and in the spring of 2014 we see the Islamic State have great success in the Sunni part of Iraq and western and northern Iraq, culminating in the late spring and early summer of 2014 of Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, falling into the hands of the Islamic State.

Blase: Here's the Institute of Public Accuracy assessment of Karzai's statement. As noted in leaked American intelligence documents and through the reporting of many and varied journalists over the last six plus years, the United States funded, supplied, armed and assisted, directly and indirectly, many jihadist groups, including ISIS in the early years of the Syrian civil war. American allies, including Israel, still support these jihadist groups directly in Syria, as well as Yemen. It would be naive, based upon decades of American covert actions and wars, to imagine the U.S. is not involved and complicit at some level with that support in these multiple countries, even if it is just approval from senior officials in Washington, DC." This includes the situation in Yemen, which has become the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. And according to most experts, it would be easy to stop what we're doing in Yemen and simply end it, simply stop fueling the planes and supporting with weapons the use of epidemic and starvation as tools of policy - would you have comments on the Yemen situation as it relates to this?

Matthew: Yes. What happens in Yemen - with our complete support, as many have said, as you have said - this catastrophe, the atrocities that are being done in Yemen by the Saudis using American bombs, planes, intelligence, refueling capacity, the killings of these people and the devastation the Saudis are wreaking on these people, would be impossible without the American refueling and American tankers. That role in Yemen by the Saudi government and on the ground with the United Arab Emirates, which have been committing atrocities on the ground and running these horrendous detention facilities where torture is widespread and has now been widely documented, that American officials have been present during the torture being used against Yemenis by the United Arab Emirates.

The American officials will be there, and then when they leave, that's when the torture starts. But the American officials certainly know what's going on from the CIA, the military and special operations. They give a wink and a nod, they give their approval.

Now, with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which is Al Qaeda's branch in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, they basically have received an incredible amount of support through the Saudi bombing and the UAE's involvement against the Shia Houthis in Yemen. Basically, what's occurred in Yemen, because of the Saudi attacks and the UAE support under the umbrella of US foreign policy - none of this is being done without our approval and support - this has benefited Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula greatly. They've made tremendous strides. They've taken more villages; they receive money because they are the ones fighting on the ground with the Shia and Houthis.

In Yemen you see this as well, where we have the United States, through its allies who are partnered with Al Qaeda, we are supporting Al Qaeda in order to achieve some really dubious and specious geopolitical gains because somehow - if you're talking to experts on Yemen and Iran the Persian Gulf region - the relationship between the Shia Houthis and the Iranian government was minimal until the current conflict started and even now it's still pretty insignificant in the larger scheme of things.

Blase: Well, we do have certain legislation pending now to get out of Yemen. Whether it will go through or not I don't know. But at least it is beginning. Now, Matthew, you're also very knowledgeable about the Iran situation. Would you care to comment about that?

Matthew: Sure. I'd like to get back to your earlier question. With Islamic State in Afghanistan, we see things happening that go way back. What we did with Nazi Germany immediately after the war, how they became our allies and we immediately started rearming them. We brought their scientists and many officers and others who had been involved in the holocaust to the United States to help with our missile and nuclear weapons program. This has always been something the US does - to utilize those we have previously accused of being the worst moral offenders in the history of mankind as our allies when it suits our purposes. The genesis of this Islamic State group in Afghanistan - because you will not hear this when you're watching CNN or reading the Wall Street Journal - they'll say that we bombed the Islamic State in Afghanistan, that Islamic State has a presence there now and is expanding - well it's not as if the Islamic State chartered planes and flew people from Iraq or Syria or wherever to Afghanistan. These men who call themselves Islamic State in Afghanistan are actually former Pakistani and Afghan Taliban who about four years ago the Afghan intelligence service, the NDS, started paying to try to make a split or cause problems within the Afghan Taliban organization. And when that didn't work out, and the Afghan government withdrew its money and support from these men, these men smartly rebranded

themselves and remarketed themselves as the Islamic State. So the people that we're now bombing and using to justify our presence in Afghanistan, are not these foreign jihadis who have come from all over the world. There may be a few but not many. So the Islamic State of Afghanistan - as in Syria, or what we're seeing in Yemen, and of course Iraq, the best example - is a creature of our own making. It's Frankenstein's monster, basically.

Now getting to Iran, and you touched on this earlier. What we're dealing with in Iran goes all the way back to the coup in the early 50s in which the US deposed the legitimately elected prime minister in Iran because he wanted to nationalize the oil, which would have affected British and US oil companies. The results, of course, included an awful police state run by the Shah that tortured and killed tens of thousands of his own people over more than a 20-year period. The revolution brings in this revolutionary Islamic government that had the priority of disestablishing relations with the US because the US gave them the Shah and kept him in power for all those years. So this fallout of relations with Iran goes back to the early 50s, and the US government's attempt to be "smart" and manipulate various factions for its own purposes - purposes that are nefarious and greedy and ultimately come down to men and women standing around in Washington DC wanting the American empire to control more. With Iran, you see the awful situation we're in. We have this president, and I agree with everything you've said about him, Blase, who is very falsely making these statements about Iran and its intentions, about how it's compliance with the treaty, about its nuclear programs, and very often, if you read the Washington Post today, and other mainstream media, there's this vein of militarism, this desire for American imperial dominance to be kept. The Washington Post, fact checking Trump's statements on Iran, utilizes sources that who talk about the Iranians being involved in terrorism or about the Iranians sheltering Al Qaeda after 9/11. The only people saying that is the American government, and its saying that for its own purposes, which are to raise tensions with Iran because we are very close to the Saudis, which is far more tyrannical and worse human rights abusers than Iran - and I don't excuse the Iranians, because they certainly have terrible human rights issues there. I think the American public, as they hear about this, just as when they hear about North Korea, have this attitude fostered by the American government and the major American corporate media, that the Iranian government is full of madmen. That the entire country - all one hundred million of them - are crazy, apocalyptic men and women who want nothing more than to bomb the west because they don't like miniskirts or something. Which, of course, couldn't be farther from the truth.

Blase: They have very solid elections, as does Venezuela. We are fighting countries that are trying to establish functioning democracies and supporting one of the worst dictatorships in the world history and helping it destroy Yemen. This really doesn't make a great deal of sense. Iran, to my knowledge, has not attacked another country in 200 years. It has been attacked during the Iran / Iraq war, which was of course started by Iraq and we supported Iraq. Of course, we supported Iran also. Henry Kissinger, in his great wisdom, said I hope they kill each other.

Matthew: I'm not an expert on all these countries - I don't speak the languages - but I spent so much time in the American government and with the American military at various levels. And I do feel that I'm an expert on the American government and military and what they do overseas. In this month's issue of Harpers, Andrew Coburn, a terrific investigative journalist, talks about Saudi involvement in 9/11. And this is not conspiracy stuff, we have the checks that were passed by the Saudi government to the hijackers. And yet there is no outrage, and we continue to sell hundreds of billions of dollars in weapons to the Saudis and continue to support their war in Yemen, which is essentially a war at our behest, you know, and we demonize the Iranians. We have someone like Donald Trump, who is willing to pull us out of this deal and bring us back to war. Based upon falsehoods. And it's interesting, Blase. People have been watching the Ken Burns documentary on PBS about the Vietnam War, so you have this massive, eighteen-hour documentary about the Vietnam War - a war built of lies, or on One Bright Shining Lie, as Neil Shaheen writes - and we have the Iraq War, again based on lies, and now they want an Iran War, again based on lies - and what I come back to, Blase, is that we are up against a sickness, as we have discussed before. Alcoholism, and I've had my issue with alcohol and got classified as having an alcohol use disorder by the VA because I used alcohol to try to get past my moral injury and guilt and PTSD after the war. Thank God I'm still here. I was a very lucky drunk, to put it simply. But it's the same type of attitude that the people who surround our government in the media or the military or congress or at the think tanks, this disease, this addiction to our empire, wars and militarism - it allows them to continue to go on with the lies, to insert themselves into these wars or to cause these wars or to carry out these occupations and coups, or to support these violent groups. Andrew Coburn's piece, as the families of the victims of 9.11 are taking the Saudi government to court, shows that our government excuses what the Saudis were involved in and blame it on Iraqis. Or as we hear from Donald Trump about why he's pulling out of the nuclear weapons deal, that the Iranians are involved with Al Qaeda, which is just simply not true. The Iranian government is not involved with Al Qaeda. But we allow ourselves because

we're so sick, we're so afflicted with the disease of American Exceptionalism, that we seem unable to stop lying ourselves into war.

Blase: This happened, you know - if you look at biblical literature, their word for the devil is the Father of Lies. The lying is so routine that I don't think they can distinguish between truth and lies. There was one airplane apparently that took off when all flights were cancelled after 9/11. And that was with the Bin Laden family going back home again after some of their people had committed a huge crime in our country, killing thousands of people. It was a crime and countries all over the world were asking if they could help to identify the guilty but we said no because we wanted to be able to make up the story to suit our own purposes. This is such an ongoing tragedy that we've had to go through for a long period of time. Every poor person in Latin America could be called a communist. Why? Because they want to have something to eat. For a half century and more, anyone who differed with us was a communist when those using the phrase could not even define what a communist was. It just meant Okay to kill. It meant that the poor of South America could be killed because we called them "communists." So were the two-year-olds we killed in Vietnam, they were "communists," don't you know.

Well, I'm afraid we're out of time, Matthew. Thank you so much for being with us today. You have so much to say about the situation we're in, as do many veterans. The connection between the veterans and the peace movement was extremely strong through the Vietnam War, and it's strong today. Veterans for Peace is one of the great organizations of veterans in the world and which rightly denounces all war. War is defunct, war and our planet are incompatible. War is not a way to solve anything, and we're just very happy that you've been with us, Matthew.

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Total Editing Time: 0 Minutes
Last Printed On: 10/19/17 6:21:00 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 11
Number of Words: 4,812
Number of Characters: 23,353 (approx.)