

## World Focus – October 29, 2017

Matthew Hoh

Well, we have someone who received a great award this week, a very special award. That's the Soviet commander who averted a nuclear war.

A senior officer of a Soviet submarine who averted the outbreak of nuclear conflict during the cold war is to be honored with a new prize, 55 years to the day after his heroic actions averted global catastrophe.

On 27 October 1962, Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov was on board the Soviet submarine B-59 near Cuba when the US forces began dropping non-lethal depth charges. While the action was designed to encourage the Soviet submarines to surface, the crew of B-59 had been incommunicado and so were unaware of the intention. They thought they were witnessing the beginning of a third world war. Trapped in the sweltering submarine – the air-conditioning was no longer working – the crew feared death. But, unknown to the US forces, they had a special weapon in their arsenal: a ten kiloton nuclear torpedo. What's more, the officers had permission to launch it without waiting for approval from Moscow.

Two of the vessel's senior officers – including the captain, Valentin Savitsky – wanted to launch the missile. According to a report from the US National Security Archive, Savitsky exclaimed: "We're gonna blast them now! We will die, but we will sink them all – we will not become the shame of the fleet." But there was an important caveat: all three senior officers on board had to agree to deploy the weapon. As a result, the situation in the control room played out very differently. Arkhipov refused to sanction the launch of the weapon and calmed the captain down. The torpedo was never fired.

Had it been launched, the fate of the world would have been very different: the attack would probably have started a nuclear war which would have caused global devastation, with unimaginable numbers of civilian deaths.

"The lesson from this is that a guy called Vasili Arkhipov saved the world," Thomas Blanton, director of the National Security Archive at George Washington University, told the Boston Globe in 2002, following a conference in which the details of the situation were explored.

The prize, dubbed the “Future of Life award” is the brainchild of the Future of Life Institute – a US-based organization whose goal is to tackle threats to humanity and whose advisory board includes such luminaries as Elon Musk, the astronomer royal Prof Martin Rees, and actor Morgan Freeman. Now, 55 years after he averted nuclear war and 19 years after his death, Arkhipov is to be honored, with his family the first recipients of a new award.

“The Future of Life award is a prize awarded for a heroic act that has greatly benefited humankind, done despite personal risk and without being rewarded at the time,” said Max Tegmark, professor of physics at MIT and leader of the Future of Life Institute.

I just want to say thank you, Vasili Arkhipov, for saving the human race. Thank you for saving all of our lives. You set an example for those in a position to refuse to follow any order to use nuclear weapons. Use of these weapons amounts to genocide, and no order to attack using nuclear weapons can ever be considered lawful.

Friends, we have a wonderful guest today who is becoming a regular on this program because he has so much to say. He's been so close to the "full spectrum dominance" that our militarism is trying to achieve. Full spectrum dominance of what? Of the globe. Troops everywhere, sometimes getting killed - surprisingly! - and people say, what are they doing there? Well, they're all over the world. They're there because of full spectrum dominance, which is an ideology based on the idea that we can control everything (we can't).

So I have today a guest, Matthew Hoh. 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](http://exposefacts.org)). He writes on issues of war, peace and post-traumatic stress disorder recovery at [matthewhoh.com](http://matthewhoh.com). Welcome, Matthew Hoh.

Matthew: Thank you, Blase.

Blase: Would you please comment on your reference to death squads in Afghanistan?

Matthew: Oh, yes. Unfortunately, it's nothing new for the US government and particularly the Central Intelligence Service, and very much like what you saw, Blase, in Guatemala. I'm almost done with your book, *Guerillas of Peace*, adapted from your dissertation, and it was so striking and so inspiring. Your perspective on that time in the late 60s, being part of a revolutionary movement for social change and justice in Guatemala, as you were. And now, 50 years later, what are our policies now, and what have been. These death squads in Afghanistan are technically called counter-terrorism pursuit teams by the CIA. They've been around for I would say at least a decade and probably even longer, they were probably called something else earlier when the US went into Afghanistan in full force after 2001. But the purposes of this are no different than what we did with the Phoenix Program during the Vietnam War, which was an awful program of murder and torture in which around 100,000 Vietnamese, so many of them innocent non-combatants, and the death squads, not just in Guatemala but in El Salvador and with the CONTRAS in Nicaragua, and then of course what happened in South America in the 70s.

And then what we saw in Iraq. It's no coincidence that when John Negroponte, who was so involved with the death squads in El Salvador, shows up to be in the American ambassador in Iraq in 2004, that the death squads began. According to a lavish article of praise from the New York Times about how the CIA is going to play a more assertive role, and a friend of mine and I were joking about that the other day - how much more assertive can the CIA be in terms of things like breaking into the US Senate's computers to spy on the US Senate, or the torture campaigns and everything else they've done, how much more assertive could they be? But the purpose of this is simply TERROR. They've utilized terror before the try to undermine adversaries, movements, or enemies of their program. And it has never worked. It has never achieved the purposes that they said it would. But it does instill terror throughout the population. And I think what you have, Blase, what you find in every aspect of human life, those of us, our current generation, always thinks we can do this better than those who went before us. So they look at the Phoenix Program, they look at death squads in Central America, or Chile and other parts of

South America, or in Iraq - and they say, well, you know what, they had it right, but they just didn't do it quite right. But we can do it right. And they actually think it's going to work, inflicting so much terror on the local population that they will not support the insurgents (in this case, the Taliban). And what we find always is that the population supports the insurgents even more.

I'm watching a wonderful documentary on Netflix about Bobby Sands, who died in prison in Northern Ireland in 1981 on a hunger strike. And in that documentary they made the same point, that the British thought that they could break the will of the IRA prisoners and that would turn the population against the IRA. And what it did, by going through with it and forcing these prisoners to suffer - or allowing them to suffer, because they volunteered to suffer in protest - turned them into martyrs. Turned them into Christ figures, basically. And for the Catholic population of Northern Ireland, wow, you couldn't have a better image for an anti-British campaign. So you see the same mistake made over and over and over again. This awful, immoral, criminal action, and that's what the CIA is going to expand in Afghanistan.

Blase: Well, we have a Christ figure in Bo Bergdahl, a traitor to American exceptionalism and white supremacy. I have this, which you wrote: "there is no forgiveness in this loudly and righteously proclaimed Christian nation, only the scapegoating of a young man and his family for the failures of immoral and unwinnable wars on the murderous altar of the twin godheads of American Exceptionalism and White Supremacy." Here this man had to leave one branch of the service because of mental illness. Then he was tortured for five years as a prisoner, and now we want to crucify him. What do we call this?

Matthew: This is pure scapegoating, and it plays into a lot of things. You can find that essay of mine on Common Dreams or on my blog, [MatthewHoh.com](http://MatthewHoh.com). But what you see is the scapegoating. We're putting the blame for these immoral and failed wars on one man and on his family as well. But it goes deeper than that. If you look at that case, up until his family stood in the Rose Garden with President Obama, there are cries from the right that he must be released, we have to do everything we can to bring him home, this is a matter of American honor and our commitment to our service members, our troops, but as soon as that father and mother stood next to President Obama, that black man with the middle name of Hussein, the political use of racial hatred begins, and once that begins you start to see, and it happens so quickly with social media, you have these awful lies about Bergadhl start to come out - like people were killed because of him, that he ran away willing with the Taliban, he helped the Taliban attack American forces, whatever they could think of to demonize him was utilized. But it goes back to his parents standing with a black president...

Blase: I have what you wrote here. It was Sergeant Bergdahl's parents standing outside the White House with President Obama that began the rage against him and his family. This was the treason that so angered and upset the white conservative audiences of Megyn Kelly and Rush Limbaugh. Sergeant Bergdahl's white parents standing at the White House with that black president and thanking him for freeing their son began the scorn, the vitriol and the outrage against Sergeant Bergdahl, his mother and his father. The audacity of Jani and Bob Bergdahl, released themselves from the captivity of the unimaginable nightmare of the imprisonment and torture of their son for five years by the Taliban, to stand with Barack Hussein Obama and to give him thanks was a betrayal to the usurped, rightful and white structures that underlie so many white Americans' understanding of United States history and society." That's a tragic but true statement. How is this going to work out?

Matthew: Well, we'll see. The sentencing will take place this week. He pleaded guilty; he and his defense team felt they had no choice but to plead guilty and throw themselves to the mercy of the court, because different aspects of the pre-trial allowances of the prosecution (it was really a judicial persecution), they were allowed to introduce soldiers who they claimed were injured while searching for Sargent Bergdahl. In one of those cases, one that was repeated across the board throughout all the major media in the US, the navy seal who was injured - well, he was wounded, but the details of the mission are classified, and what the defense team has argued is that they were going after someone else, they weren't looking for Bergdahl. But the judge allowed him to testify, along with several others, in terms of helping with the sentencing; but again, how can we, if we actually believe these things about supporting our service members or the Christian aspects of forgiveness, or understanding what Bergdahl went through as a prisoner of war. He was tortured more than anyone has been tortured as a prisoner of war since the Vietnam War. And this was testified to by the department of defense's top prisoner of war experts.

Blase: We're going to punish this soldier; we don't seem to punish those responsible for the disaster in Yemen, which is an ongoing war crime. We have filled their aircraft with fuel in the air 9000 times so that they can bomb the hell out of civilians and create a cholera disaster unmatched around the world. It's really amazing how we go to sometimes non-commissioned officers to be punished rather than those who created the problems. I think we have to turn this on its head, don't you?

Matthew: Oh, absolutely. I've been involved in this and have been a friend of the family since before Bo was released. I had dinner with them two nights before Bo was released. I've never seen the look I saw in her eyes that night, the look of a woman whose child is being held captive, and who knows he's being

tortured, and she doesn't know if he'll ever come home. That look - and I've been to a lot of funerals of young men with their youngish mothers who are devastated - but I've never seen anything like what I saw in Janie's eyes that night. That kind of pain.

I've been saying it's right to be angry about what happened to those soldiers who were wounded, or even the soldiers who were supposedly killed for Bo Bergdahl (but weren't; they were killed on other missions). It's right to be angry, but who should we be angry at? Those in charge! Those who sent those young men to these wars, who continue these operations around the world where our young people are killing and being killed for purposes that belie the stated purposes. Democracy, human rights, all these other lies we perpetuate as the basis of our imperialism and our empire abroad. The people we should be angry at are the people who then lie about these soldier's deaths, or about these soldiers being injured, or about Bo Bergdahl's situation, lie for their own political purposes, driving up, again, going back to the racial hatred toward Barak Obama that so animates the people who are so furious at Bo Bergdahl and want him to be hanged. You see the same thing too; you can draw parallels to just the partisan nature of this which again is so fueled by racism. You can see the outrage that occurred when four Americans were killed in Libya doing God knows what when Barak Obama was president, but the outrage is missing over the four Americans who were killed in Niger under Donald Trump. And God knows what those four Americans were doing there.

Blase: You know, you mention in Common Dreams:

“The grand mythology of American militarism, a key pillar of both American Exceptionalism and White Supremacy, does not allow for figures such as Sergeant Bergdahl. The greatest military in the history of the world is a required statement of faith for all American politicians and public persons, even though the American military has not achieved victory in war in over seventy years, so an explanation of collusion and cooperation with anti-American and anti-white forces is necessary to provide the causation of such an undermining.”

We now see the cholera in Yemen has gone up to a million children on the verge of death. They have this report coming to us by the Earth Action Network, and the question being asked by the author is, “Will anyone lift a finger?” Last week UNICEF arrived in Jordan after being in Yemen, and our representative, Tony Lake, yeah, used to be in government, with a clear message: “All of us should feel immense pity, even agony, for those children and others who are suffering. They should feel anger...anger that this, our generation, is scarred by the irresponsibility of government and others to

allow these things to be happening." It's so important to be able to point out the problem areas. People often say, well, say something positive, and they confuse positive and negative. If someone is running off a cliff and you shout, "stop, you stupid idiot, or you'll kill yourself," that is a very positive statement. If someone yelled, "enjoy your day and have a nice jump," that's a negative statement. The truth frequently hurts, and we must not be afraid to deal with it. That's what you're trying to deal with, and all of the great Veterans for Peace are trying to deal with it. They've seen it, they've been there, they realize that something is terribly wrong and cannot continue. We repeat and repeat and repeat. We do what all the scholars have said is a sign of insanity - to repeat the same thing over and over and over again, expecting a different outcome. Every scholar of military history has said bombing increases resistance among people. We have caused people to resist all over the world. How do we turn this around so that we can seek and act in peace and justice? How do we do it?

Matthew: The actions of our government against unarmed people or helpless innocent people grows the will to resist. There's another study released by the UN last month that found that 75 percent of militants in Africa - Boko Haram, Islamic State, etc - joined those organizations because the government has killed a family member or a neighbor or someone they knew. There is reason behind their action. They're not doing it out of some kind of obligation to a misunderstood religion - no, this is motivated by the crimes that have been committed directly against them. The killing of family or friends or neighbors, the killing of fellow villagers...we see this throughout the world. What has to be done, of course, is...well, we're so far gone. You spoke about Full Spectrum Dominance. That's not just with our weapons and our computer systems, our hacks and the launching of viruses (we're the worst offenders in the world, of course) but all those things that are cultural, soft power, the people I worked with run television ads near the bases where our drones operate from, and these ads encourage the drone operators to look at what they're doing and follow their conscience. Well, we see now what they run up by (in Hancock, where they run the drones) - I mean, it's such an amazing thing that we have young men and women who murder people from ten thousand miles away via remote control flying robots, and they're at home at night for dinner with their families.

Blase: Yes, and they're getting PTSD in large numbers. It's driving them crazy. How you can do that - kill people all day and then go home and say hello to your dear wife and children, and expect to be the same person. Here's the NYT with an interesting question: "What does victory of ISIS look like?" And it follows with the phrase "hollowed out cities," and it mentions Raqqa in Syria, Mosul and Fallujah in Iraq, Ramadi in Iraq, Kobani in Syria. This destruction, and I think there are plenty of pictures proving it, is not

simply street fighting but constant bombing, and it is very obvious that these cities were bombed out. Did we have any role in that?

Matthew: Yes, of course, and getting back to the drones, CNN will not air the "Drone Operators: Respect Your Conscience - Don't Kill People Overseas" television ad in the Syracuse area. And once again, that's influenced by the militarism that is so part and parcel of our culture and so important to the full spectrum dominance that you speak of. It's the mass killing that we've done, so in Western Syrian our NATO allies including Australia and Great Britain have just devastated and smashed entire cities. There is some recent drone footage from Raqqa of what the city looks like now, and Raqqa of course was taken by Nusra Front and elements that became Islamic State, and these were organizations that were actively supported by the United States and Saudi Arabia and Qatar and Turkey, and still are.

We allowed these groups to take control of cities, and then destroyed them because it didn't work out as our genius politicians and militarists planned with all their great geopolitical machinations. We have now destroyed cities after placing them in the grip of this awful "caliphate," this insidious evil group. It didn't go our way, so we launched airstrikes against our former allies for our own purposes. There's no question of good and evil, because there's evil on all sides, and Iraq you see the same things too. Our support for Islamic State in eastern Syria, and because we invaded and occupied Iraq in 2003, and all the sanctions and daily bombings before the invasion - all inflicted on the Iraqi people - and when it doesn't work out our way, we back the Iraqi army and just flatten cities and towns throughout the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and Sunni areas. In Mosul, the early estimates are 40,000 people killed, and the drone footage of the city looks like Stalingrad. Or Dresden after WWII. It's just rubble, burned out rubble. And the estimates of 40,000 people are going to be low. A rule of thumb I've heard from many people is to double the initial number. How many human beings are still buried under the rubble? We'll probably never know.

This is what the American military has decided to be. Its plan of operations in Muslim countries, where our proxy governments, or with our proxies the Kurds in Syria, the whole goal is subjugation. There's no political goal. There's not going to be new elections or economic development or reconciliation. They are going to use mass firepower, air, drone and artillery strikes, and CIA commandos and death squads. The squads will expand. They are part of this. You are just using state terror to achieve the goal of subjugating the people that are outside of your allies or your proxy government controls.

Blase: We have here the Institute for Public Accuracy statement. The final paragraph from you says:

“This CIA program of using Afghan militias to conduct commando raids, the vast majority of which will be used against civilians despite what the CIA states, falls in line with American plans to escalate the use of air and artillery strikes against the Afghan people in Taliban-held areas, almost all of whom are Pashtuns.

Again, the purpose of this campaign is not to achieve a political settlement or reconciliation, but to brutally subjugate and punish the people, mostly rural Pashtuns, who support the Taliban and will not give in to the corrupt American run government in Kabul.”

Well, there it is. These are the people who happen to live there, right?

Matthew: Yes, and again, what you hear on CNN or read in the Wall Street Journal will say that they're Taliban and religiously motivated. That's not the case, and we know it's not the case. It was the same in Vietnam, where we claimed everyone we were fighting were communists. And as you write about in your books about Central America, anyone who opposes the regimes we support and the corruption they practice is deemed a communist. If you want education or healthcare, you're a communist.

So as we've seen in Central America and Vietnam, people are actually fighting for their rights. They do not want to be occupied. The same is true in Afghanistan. In 2009, right before I resigned, there was a leaked document in the Boston Globe from our intelligence agencies that said, look, we've interrogated captured members of the Taliban, and 90 percent of them are fighting us because of the occupation, not for religious reasons. We saw the same thing in Iraq. They always spoke about how we were fighting Al Qaeda. But we knew from interrogations that less than 5 percent of those fighting us in Iraq had anything to do with Al Qaeda, and the 5 percent of others who were mostly people who had traveled there from other countries, they didn't say it was because their religion told them to do so or because of forced conversions or because of 72 blessed virgins in paradise or any of the other lies you hear. What it was, they were coming to fight us in Iraq because of our torture at Abu Ghraib, or at Guantanamo, or the torture of the entire Iraqi people with our invasion and occupation. So when you understand what their motivations are, you know then, as we've seen in other insurgent movements in Iraq or the Taliban in Afghanistan, those who are forming the bulk of the resistance and insurgency are doing so to defy the occupation. They are very easily coopted by extremist groups that have awful agendas - which is similar to what we see here in the United States, right? The purpose of the US military is to secure the blessings of our empire abroad and to make sure our corporations continue to make more money and that the US maintains political control over most of the planet. But if you ask the young men and women who join

the military what they're doing it for, they don't say that, they say they're doing it because they want to "serve" or they want to make life better for other people or they want to protect their country.

So you see so often these people, whether they be Americans or Iraqis or Afghans, whether they be Christians or Muslims or atheists or whatever, their intentions are good, but they are being coopted and used by these powers that can control them and manipulate them with the big lie. Going back to your book *Guerillas of Peace* on liberation theology - all that was being done in Guatemala, separating ourselves from all the powers that be, distancing ourselves from the churches that support these wars and put up support our troops banners, distancing ourselves from the political parties, the democrats and republicans, all are the same when it comes to the war and the war machine. The vast majority of them are identical on these issues, just as they are on finance and healthcare much of the time. So we have to understand that what we're doing abroad is motivated by what we're doing here at home. I came across a statistic yesterday that really shocked me, in terms of the number of black people shot by police as opposed to white people shot by police. It's a 30 to 1 difference! That's what we're doing at home to our own people, so why would we be surprised that we're murdering and torturing people abroad? When we do the very same thing to our own people here. And, of course, we have no better reference than the First Nations here, the indigenous people here - we are standing on their property right now.

Blase: Yes, that's true. Well, Matthew, I'm afraid we've run out of time again. It's always so good to talk with you. Thank you for being with us today on World Focus, Matthew Hoh.

Matthew: Thank you Blase, and thank you for all your work.

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