

World Focus – November 12, 2017

Matthew Hoh

We're ecstatic to say that Our Revolution-backed candidates claimed victories at every level of government in cities, towns and neighborhoods all across America. Voters showed up for election day 2017 and swept progressive candidates into office. Our Revolution won 21 seats and one ballot initiative with more results yet to be finalized. So congratulations to Bernie Sanders and Our Revolution for a tremendous political realignment of winning candidates. The wakeup call is working. We anxiously hope to see an end to the clear and present danger of our current administration.

While this realignment is taking place, we must consider ending our worship of the God of Metal. Idol worship was the great evil in biblical literature. At its worst, it was to worship gods of metal. Though we don't often call it idol worship today, the basic syndrome remains. The world's largest employer, the world's largest polluter - the US military - creates gods of metal which we are told will protect us. Gods of metal also have a sacrament called American Exceptionalism. Large numbers of US Christians are actually far more dedicated to the gods of metal than they are to the law of compassion.

Some of this is related to the fact that one can get a ministerial degree for a few dollars by mail order. But much of it is related to the prostitution of religion by those who should know better. Huge numbers of nominal Christians voted for Donald Trump. Why? Because they related to empire more than to the spirit. They worshipped the gods of metal. Well, the good book doesn't speak of the success of empire but of the failure. Some think we are in the final days, and they might be right. But the book that speaks of final days, speaks of the death of empire, not the saving power of imperial idols. Both believers and unbelievers should ponder this quote from this most difficult of books in the Bible, Revelations. "Gods of Metal Christians have misunderstood everything."

Many pristine followers of Jesus would not serve in the imperial army of Rome because they fully believed you cannot serve empire and serve the Great Spirit. The two are not compatible. So today, millions of nominal Christians are promoting the antithesis of the Gospel Message. Put your seat belts on now and listen to the Book of Revelations, an anti-imperial rant: Here's chapter 17:

"The rulers of the earth joined in the idolaters' sin, and the inhabitants of the earth got drunk on the wine of their idolatry."

Now friends, I ask you: isn't this what is happening? People are looking to the Gods of Metal to save them. "They pour out their wealth to build more and more idols." It hasn't worked, it's not working now - it never works. Seventy-five years of war after WWII. The largest employer in the world is the US military. The largest purveyor of violence on earth is drunk on the wine of idolatry. They trust that the Gods of Metal are better than healthcare, education, housing, food for the poor of the earth. Better than rehabilitation of addicts and felons, all now which could be accomplished with a small fraction of the filthy lucre we are spending on idol worship.

Many preachers of many faiths seem to conform their message to power and to power alone - no matter how repugnant the power. Oh my goodness, here we go. Revelations 17:

"And the rulers of the earth joined in the idolaters' sin, and the earth's buyers and sellers grew because of their idolatrous greed."

Chapter 18:

"Mourn. Mourn for this great city clothed in fine linen, purple and scarlet. For all your finery of gold, jewels and pearls, in one hour, this great wealth is destroyed."

Well, friends, what could destroy this great wealth in one hour? Our Gods of Metal. Our Gods of nuclear warfare. Friends, there are many symbols in the last book of the New Testament, Revelations. The symbols certainly can't be taken literally, but they do make sense figuratively. Today is Veterans Day, and we mourn the deaths of each and every person who died in the dedication to serve. We mourn their deaths during two centuries where the majority of the dead are civilian. Children. Women. Non-combatants in their millions, innocent victims of the Gods of Metal.

Well, today I'm privileged to have a member of Veterans for Peace, that great group of people who have served and are dedicated to abolishing war. Patriotism should not have any borders. This tiny grain of sand in the universe, planet earth, on which we live, is in great danger. We can afford idol worship no more. No more Gods of Metal. You've met Matthew Hoh before. I'm always happy to have him as a guest because he represents a future created by people who know what war is and know that war must be abolished.

Also, he has the necessary credentials. 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: Thank you, Blase. Thanks for having me on again.

Blase: I want to wish you a happy Veteran's Day. You know, more than ever, I guess I should ask you for your thoughts on Veteran's Day.

Matthew: Well, thank you, and Happy Veteran's Day to you as well. You and I are both alumni of the Marine Corps. It's fascinating how this celebration of veterans so often goes over the head of actual veterans and is done for purpose other than looking at veterans, understanding them and seeing what their worlds are like. A friend of mine, Peter Van Buren, who has written a good deal, was in the State Department and was forced to resign because the book he wrote about his experiences in Iraq while in the State Department, *We Meant Well*, a book a highly recommend, has written another book called *Hubris War*. It's an alternative history book, but it's really about moral injury and the guilt of war. It takes place in a fictionalized invasion of Japan in 1946.

When he's interviewed about the book, one of the things he speaks about so well on behalf of veterans. If you're going to see these young men with amputated limbs, or in wheelchairs, young men who have lost their eyesight, and who are now doing great things about the help and the care that they're getting (they're running marathons, or driving cars and doing things that people suffering from their disabilities would not be expected to be able to do), check in with them in ten or fifteen years. Are we going to go back and talk to them after that time has passed? After the wife has left them? After the children will no longer speak with them? After the money has run out and he's still driving the same car that was retrofitted twenty years ago? Are we going to visit with these men when they are middle aged and older

men who have lived a lifetime with the consequences of the war? And of course, there's a discussion of Veterans Day and the sacrifice of veterans, and what never comes up is the question of whether it was worth it, or the cost to non-Americans, which is almost always left out of the conversation. The millions upon millions who have been injured and left homeless by our wars overseas. They are left out of the conversation.

He also wrote Hooper's War, *We Meant Well*. Peter Van Buren. I urge people to read his work. He came home from Iraq and wrote a book about his year working in Iraq for the State Department, and that book got him in a lot of trouble with the State Department. He was basically forced to resign. Fortunately, he had a very good attorney, Jesselyn Radack, who many people may know about from her defense of other whistle blowers like Thomas Drake and Edward Snowden, Bill Binney and Coleen Rowley. Jesselyn has been a real savior. Peter was able to retire with his benefits and his pension. The state department was trying to strip him of both because he wrote a book about what was occurring in Iraq.

Blase: That phrase, we meant well, is so common - we heard it in Ken Burns film, which has so many recordings of the horrible war in Vietnam. But the theme of we meant well is really unfortunate, because together with it goes the phrase *a tragic mistake*. I don't think these wars can be called tragic mistakes. They were carefully planned. The people involved in the planning knew the tragedy they were creating - they'd have to be completely incoherent if they didn't know. So we can't just say we meant well, or call it a tragic mistake. This has been part and parcel of military industrial government for many years now. So how do we turn the page?

Matthew: Absolutely, Blase. A tragic mistake occurs, for example, when somebody puts the car in reverse thinking they'd put it in drive and they run over their neighbor. That's a tragic mistake. What we've seen continually are policies that have been enacted by the United States going back, right, to what we did do the First Nations, the indigenous people and *that* genocide. We knew what would happen to them due to our encroachment, our colonization and settlement, and *desiring that result*. And that goes all the way through our policies in Asia and Central and South America, in Southeast Asia, and on and on and on and on. I think it's easy for people to accept that trope or excuse of tragic escape or we meant well. Ever the Ken Burns film on Vietnam, that 18-hour documentary on Vietnam, the narrator begins by saying "It began in good faith by decent people."

Blase: I know, that's very unfortunate.

Matthew: You see it over and over again, even as you hear these people talking about the war in Iraq, and as I'm sure you witnessed during your time in Central America. Support death squad governments, but *we meant well. It was done in good faith.*

Blase: You can't possibly mean well when you torture people and destroy their infrastructure. You see so many people tortured, and our agency there, the CIA, with complete and total awareness of what's going on. In the case of countries like Guatemala, the US has been running the country through its genocidally vicious governments since 1954. Here we have today the United Nations' wire from the UN Foundation saying the Yemen blockade could bring us the largest famine the world has seen for many decades, threatening the lives of millions of people. Nearly nine hundred thousand people are now infected with cholera.

Do we mean well when we cause this? Do we mean well? Do you think that is possible? Or is there another component or two here?

Matthew: People should realize that what the Saudi and the UAE have done in Yemen is the intentional bombing of hospitals, schools, infrastructure like ports and cranes, roads and bridges, which has caused the famine and the cholera epidemic, and that was intentional, that was what they meant to do. You don't do that unless your purpose is to punish the civilian population and cause intense human suffering. What you'll hear, though, with Yemen, particularly with so many members of our congress, is that "we have to do this because of the danger of Iran." This is why we had to go into Iraq - the dangers of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. We had to go into Vietnam, because the Soviet Union would put in a naval base. On and on and on, these rationalizations of hideous crimes that are wound into phrases like well-intentioned mistakes or tragic mistakes. And it goes back to what you spoke about in the beginning of the show. America's religion - and I think we have several gods that we worship in this country, and certainly one of them is militarism. The inability of people to think critically and look at and weigh the evidence and come to rational conclusions results in part from our worship of the military and militarism. I was just on a train last week and there was a man, a midshipman at the Naval Academy, and because he had his name tag on I could see that he was a sophomore in his second year at the Naval Academy. And this lady came up to him and said, "I'm so sorry I forgot to thank you for your service." She could have been an oncologist who saves kids from cancer. And here she is apologizing for not thanking a nineteen-year-old kid who was getting free room and board and tuition at the Naval Academy. This obedience to it, this sense of obligation reminds me of the worst aspects of

religious dogma. Don't question. Only have faith. Do not disagree. Just go along with what you're being told.

And that's what you see so much when cases like Yemen or what happened in Libya (or Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan). In each of these conflicts, you can find the same kind of rhetoric - it was a tragic error, we'll do better next time. I just saw recently that so far this year, 13,000 people have drowned trying to cross from Libya to Italy. 13,000 people just this year, and you've seen similar numbers during previous years. People are trying to escape the war in Libya that was our responsibility, that we took part in to such a great extent. We precipitated and sustained it, and then walked away from it. Again we hear our intentions were good, it just didn't work out.

Blase: The intentions were so good that we destroyed the richest government in Africa, Libya. And it offered education, healthcare to its people. Gave oil money directly to its people on a regular basis. It had been poor, but became very rich. I also agreed to a non-nuclear future, and that scared everyone else who didn't because they were destroyed because they lacked a deterrent. So they conclude the obvious - you have to have nukes in order not to be destroyed. That's a rationale for the growth of nuclearism, and the president, being in Asia, spoke of the "cult situation" on North Korea. That may be true, but we have a similar problem here. He brags that he can say anything and people will still agree with him. That's a sign of a cult. The cult leader, whether his name is Adolph or something else, when the leader speaks, everyone says Seig Heil. Then you know you're in a cult. You're not acting rationally.

This is from the Intercept:

"The brutal war in Yemen has intensified in recent days, with the Saudi-led coalition backed by the United States increasing its bombing campaign and blockade of ports. Meanwhile, the architect of the war, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has launched a widespread purge of the government, while using a missile launched from Yemen as a pretext to threaten war with Iran."

Now, are people going to try to deal with this rationally, or are they going to say "Three Cheers for Saudi Arabia?"

Matthew: You know, unfortunately that's exactly what they've been saying. This purge of government is a good sign that someone is taking control of the situation there. The Saudis earlier this week claimed that Lebanon had basically declared war on them, meaning that Saudi Arabia was going to increase tension with Lebanon. You know, whenever you see a larger, stronger nation, a wealthier nation, saying that a

smaller nation has declared war on them, you have to really brace yourself for what is about to occur. And this all ties into not only what we're seeing overseas, but it's similar to the thoughts, attitudes and opinions of so many people in the United States. We had that awful shooting in Texas in the church, and the attitude toward that is the same - well, our system isn't great, but we have a second amendment which allows for guns so we have to allow these things to happen. And then others say it was God's will that this happen. I read about an anchor on FOX news who said if they were going to be killed, it was the best place for them to be killed, because they were close to Jesus.

So you have the same type of infantile, slave-like response to violent actions in the world that we should be doing something about and can do something about. But so many in this country are willing to accept these tropes and these clichés and these dictums - we meant well; we have the best system; the alternative would be worse. And what the results of this tend to be is a call for more violence, more guns, raising the defense budget from 6 to 7 hundred billion dollars.

Blase: Logic is part of the study of philosophy. And we are so limited in the studies, which could begin in kindergarten or first grade with simple logic being taught. Well, a car is a deadly weapon, and therefore should be licensed, because only people who know how to drive should be able to drive because driving is a privilege. And now let's talk about deadly weapons. They also are deadly, just as a car is deadly. It would be quite logical to license every weapon in the country so that we can see that people who have them are sane and can act in a human way. Logic is there, but so much is done by pure emotional, cult-like dictatorship from people who apparently have the gift of recruiting people for a lost cause. This is what we're dealing with - extreme emotion rather than logic. It's much better to go the route of logic. Here's even the Red Cross saying "we are deeply disappointed that the house leadership has again prevented a debate and vote on ending US participation in the Saudi-led war in Yemen, which is largely responsible for the world's worst humanitarian crisis." It doesn't require much debate to say that we shouldn't be the father of the worst crisis by enabling Saudi Arabia and being a direct participant in this slaughter in the poorest country. One of the richest nations in the world is destroying one of the poorest in the Arab world, and it's taking place on our watch, you might say. So here we are. So many have spoken out against it saying that "the US has provided cover for the Saudi strategy of mass starvation", that's Gareth Porter. Is Saudi Arabia using starvation as a weapon? Are we complicit? All of this is part and parcel of what we must think about on what a long time ago had a different name. Why was it called Armistice Day?

Matthew: Armistice Day came as a result of the end of the Second World War, and there was a spirit and movement within veterans of that time that said Never Again. It took a number of years for it to become a holiday (1932) but the congress originally passed this Armistice Day for people to remember and to reflect. The purposes were for mutual cooperation and understanding with other nations of the world. It was a day to reflect on what had occurred, and why we must pursue peace. The First World War had been so awful that we could not allow it to happen again. And the very first marchers in the first Armistice parade carried a banner that said, Never Again. That happened in the United Kingdom and the United States, where veterans marched in the unit that they belonged to during the war. With banners that said Never Again. Unfortunately, after the Second World War, and after the Korean War, in the midst of the Cold War and at the height of McCarthyism and Cold War hysteria, during which we added religious references to the Pledge of Allegiance - we also changed Armistice Day to Veterans Day to make the holiday more nationalist, more "American". Because at this point, with the Red Scare, it became a political usage; we're going to have a day that will make Americans proud to be Americans, which along with Memorial Day, which is strategically placed on the other side of the calendar about six months before, this will cause people to stop any concern or protest or discussion they may have on the costs of militarism and our wars. On the costs of the Cold War. On what we're doing in the aggression against the Soviet Union. If we're reflecting on what the veterans did, and if we have this culture where the veterans are basically these acolytes within our religions of American Militarism and American Exceptionalism and the myths about all the threats against *us*. Well, then this holiday can be used to serve that purpose...

Blase: Every taxpayer will on average spend 23,000 on war this year. That does not include the future interest on war borrowing. Or the costs to state and local governments. It does not include gifts of excess military equipment to countries in or near war zones, or the value of military spending on these wars by US allies, or the costs of special ops, covert black ops, and training military personnel in more than a hundred other countries. This also does not consider the human price paid by those who lose their lives, those emotionally scarred and physically disabled, among armed forces and civilians alike, or the destruction rained down on the countries where these wars are fought.

We must end this madness before it ends us. And that is the cry coming from the peace movement in the United States on this day. Any thoughts on those comments, Matthew?

Matthew: I think it's important for people to recognize that the culture that supports militarism and uses Veterans Day as a day of hero worship as opposed to a day of reflection and remembrance. They

practice this 365 days a year, so we have to practice peace 365 days a year as well. What we're up against here is massive, massive amounts of wealth and money, and a culture violence that celebrates violence as a solution - you see that in Hollywood, in our television shows, and the reactions of so many people to the massacre in a church last weekend in Texas. The attorney general said *we need more guns in church!* Here's the top law enforcement officer of the state saying that the way forward is more guns, more violence. And so that is a 365 day a year exercise that they conduct, and we must do the same. We have to keep it up all year long because the violence doesn't stop, and the culture and industries that benefit from that violence engages in it non-stop. We have to counter it all year long ourselves as well.

Blase: Father Dan Berrigan said to us during the time of Catonsville in 1968. "Our dedication to peace is partial. Our dedication to war is total." There an article by Daniel Davis here called *Stop the Malignant Use of the US Military*: "Last month, Secretary of Defense James Mattis warned that if Congress doesn't "remove the defense caps," he said, "then we're questioning whether or not America has the ability to survive." This claim that insufficient increases in Pentagon spending threatens American security is flatly wrong. The real and present danger to our national security is the unnecessary use of U.S. military power abroad.

But here is out defense secretary saying we have to remove these caps on defense. Here's the man - he may not have known it - but he's the man who was one of the great initiators of ISIS by what he did in Fallujah, which will never be forgotten. We have witnesses who saw what happened and recorded the destruction that was done there by Mad Dog Mattis, and here he is saying we have to remove caps on military spending. That is perhaps an example of what the problem is. At least, it looks that way to me. Did you have much work with him during the days he was called Mad Dog?

Matthew: No, I didn't, though I knew of him from early on. He was the commander who took the marines into Afghanistan in 2001 after the 9/11 attack. He's very cunning, very smart. A man not to be underestimated. He has become secretary of defense, whereas the other generals of the era who were his contemporaries, General Petraeus and General McChrystal, or General Allen, all men who loved the limelight and went to the Super Bowl and threw out the first ball and did all those public relations things in support of militarism, fell apart because of their own vainglorious actions. Mattis, I recall from when I worked for the pentagon for the secretary of the navy, at that point after he had been in Afghanistan, his biography was very different from the biography of most general officers. Most had full page blogs that let everyone know where they had gone to school, what they had done, you know, but Mattis' was very short, and he came across as somebody who didn't care about his carrer or surviving and winning in

the DC military political system. He was only about the young men and women in the command. But we know that not to be the case, because you see where he has risen to, where he has gotten himself to. So you have a man who says "if we don't spend more on the military, we're facing the end of the United States - well, we're spending 700 billion on the military this year, ten times more than Russia spends, three or four times what China spends, more than the next ten nations combined. And that 700 billion is just the base budget and does not include funding all the wars we've been fighting all these years. Iraq, Syria, etc. It doesn't include spending on nuclear weapons, on homeland security, spending for veterans, our interest on the war debt - which this year will be 115 billion dollars just on debt payment for past wars. And we came out of a presidency, the presidency of Barack Obama, who spent more money on "defense" than almost any other president in history. You have to go back to FDR who spent more on the military than President Obama did. However, just like all these other tropes and things that are taken for granted and not questioned by politicians, the media or the public, is this notion that Obama let the military basically go bankrupt and that he did the military a disservice by not spending more money on it, is a complete lie.

Blase: We're surrounded by lies like that. The end of the Trump era will not end military industrialism. We've had it, and the only exception since Kennedy is Carter, who was the one who did negotiations, who talked to North Korea, who offered to go there in Trump's name today. We have some understanding of this, and what we mentioned earlier, Matthew, through the author Reza Aslan, who recently wrote a book called *God: A Human History*. I am not the first person to point this out: There's been a cultish quality to President Trump's most ardent supporters. He seemed to acknowledge the phenomenon when he boasted that he could "stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody" and not lose voters.

Throughout the campaign, and in personal appearances since then, Trump has harnessed the kind of emotional intensity from his base that is more typical of a religious revival meeting than a political rally, complete with ritualized communal chants ("Lock her up!").

As we approach the one-year anniversary of Trump's election victory, the zeal of some of his followers seems increasingly akin to a full-fledged cult.

This is an excellent statement, and I applaud the LA Times for publishing the article. We have this kind of thing coming from the president, but also from the generals - we have generals everywhere, and it's worrisome that even on the news at night we have to see these generals. I hope we can get a lot more about what is really happening.

So we only have a few moments left. Do you have some final thoughts for us, Matthew Hoh?

Matthew: The way you began about the candidates that you were endorsing - the different political action you were endorsing - is so important. It's that type of activity combined with many other things, of course, but being done by people who are dedicated to changing the system, who have a belief and an understanding that what we are experiencing now is not right, it is not just, and believe that we can change it. Change has been brought about in the past. It has always been fought against, but change has occurred. If that's any type of message that should come from the original intent of Armistice Day and the marchers cry of Never Again to war because what they had been slaughtered for on the plains of France was exactly that those Gods of Metal as the monarchies of Europe fought one another for the ultimate possession of various colonies. To make sure that their economies could not just sustain themselves but continue to expand. Year after year, decade after decade, we continue to do that, but there are people in this country who don't believe that is right, who don't believe that is just, who know that it is wrong. And they are taking action. That is the best way, I think, to honor the original spirit and intent of Armistice Day and the men who marched under the banner of Never Again.

Blase: Yes, we are seeing the beginning of a new alignment. And I don't mean a change of parties, but a realignment that is a complete change in thinking, a massive change of mind. You might say repentance, a complete shifting of where they were to somewhere else. It is possible, and I think we're seeing through the leadership of Bernie Sanders a direction towards a realignment. The young should get out and run for office, should support these candidates that are looking to a peaceful future. Do not allow what is going on to continue. You cannot accept where either party is coming from. We don't need two military industrial parties. We don't need even one, and right now we have two. I don't care what they call the new party, and I don't care if they even keep the same names. But there has to be a change from a policy of constantly seeking war as a solution. We have had no success in 75 years of war post WWII, and it is destroying our country. We have to become internationalists. We have to see that we live on this little spaceship, and we think we can fire to the forward part of the spaceship and that that's not going to hurt the aft part of the spaceship. No, we are all going down together if this madness of Gods of Metal continues. Thank you for being with us again, and I hope you can be with us often, because the three demons that Dr. King identified as militarism, racism and poverty are all intertwined. Thank you for being with us.

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