

In Support of HB 0220: "Defend the Guard"

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To: Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee

My name is Matthew Hoh. I am an Emeritus Senior Fellow with the Center for International Policy and a Fellow with the Eisenhower Media Network. I was a Marine Corps officer for ten years and a political officer with the State Department. I participated in the Iraq War twice and the Afghan War once. I am a 100% disabled combat veteran.

I support HB 0220.

The wars to which the National Guard continues to be sent are never-ending, counter-productive and failed, as well as undeclared and constitutionally illegal.

To illustrate how these wars have been counter-productive, consider just two simple facts: In the years before the US invasion in 2001, Afghanistan and Pakistan were home to four international terror groups. By the time the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, according to Pentagon information, that number had grown to 20 groups. Secondly, when the US first invaded Afghanistan, according to CIA and FBI estimates, al-Qaeda counted between 200 and 400 total members worldwide. Al-Qaeda has since spawned branches and off-shoots—including the Islamic State—in dozens of countries, with membership in the tens of thousands, and have, at times, controlled entire cities in multiple countries.

Additionally, these wars have been based and sustained upon lies. While our Congress has not had a sense of responsibility for their duties, the United Kingdom's Parliament has held formal inquiries that have confirmed both the wars in Iraq and Libya were built on lies. At the same time, in December 2019, the Washington Post published hundreds of official testimonies from US military and government officials confirming the war in Afghanistan had been a deliberate and concerted program of systemic lying.

When National Guard units are deployed to these wars, their communities and states are left without help. Most famously was the Louisiana National Guard in 2005, which was in Iraq when Hurricane Katrina hit. There have been numerous examples across multiple states of the National Guard not being available for their neighbors and communities. For instance, in 2020, when record wildfires devastated Oregon, the helicopters the Oregon National Guard needed to fight the wildfires were not in Oregon but in Afghanistan. In my home state, North Carolina, the North Carolina National Guard was deployed to Syria and Kuwait as the pandemic began. In Syria, North Carolina Guard units defended the oil fields the Trump Administration had awarded to a private company.

National Guard units continue to provide the bulk of US forces in Syria for controlling the oil fields. As you know, the Maryland National Guard deployed last week to perform that task. I do not believe most Maryland citizens know the purposes of their Guard's deployment. There certainly has not been a US congressional debate to authorize such a use of your state's citizens and resources. If Maryland National Guard soldiers are killed protecting Syria's oil fields for the benefit of private companies, is that justifiable to the Maryland public?

Our elected representatives in Washington, DC, are unwilling to fulfill their constitutional duties. This includes ensuring the men and women who step forward to defend, protect and help their neighbors and communities by joining the National Guard are not deployed to failed, counter-productive and constitutionally unapproved wars. These men and women are being abused and betrayed in this failure. I ask you to do what our members of Congress in Washington, DC, will not do and pass the Defend the Guard Act. The men and women of the Guard deserve the same level of courage and integrity in their elected leaders as they themselves demonstrate. Please pass HB 0220, Defend the Guard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Hoh", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Hoh