



Mississippi AG: No Prosecution Plans In Till's Lynching

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Mississippi's top legal official has no plan to prosecute the white woman whose accusation set off the lynching of Black teenager Emmett Till nearly 70 years ago, an aide said Friday following revelations about an unserved arrest warrant and a newly revealed memoir by the woman.

"There's no new evidence to open the case back up," Michelle Williams, chief of staff for Attorney General Lynn Fitch, told The Associated Press.

Williams also said Fitch's office has not been in contact with Leflore County District Attorney Dewayne Richardson, the local prosecutor who would be responsible for pursuing any case against Carolyn Bryant Donham.

The Justice Department previously investigated without filing charges and closed the case, Williams said, referring to the government's decision in December to end its most recent review of the infamous slaying.

Neither Richardson nor Leflore Sheriff Ricky Banks immediately returned messages seeking comment Friday.

A group searching the basement of the Leflore County Courthouse in June discovered the unserved arrest warrant charging Donham, then-husband Roy Bryant and brother-in-law J.W. Milam in Till's abduction in 1955. While the men were arrested and acquitted on murder charges in Till's subsequent slaying, Donham, 21 at the time and 87 now, was never taken into custody.

In an unpublished memoir obtained Thursday by The Associated Press, Donham said she was unaware of what would happen to the 14-year-old Till, who lived in Chicago and was visiting relatives in Mississippi when he was abducted, killed and tossed in a river. She accused him of making lewd comments and grabbing her while she worked alone at a family store in Money, Mississippi.

Donham said in the manuscript that the men brought Till to her in the middle of the night for identification but that she tried to help the youth by denying it was him. Despite being abducted at gunpoint from a family home by Roy Bryant and Milam, the 14-year-old identified himself to the men, she claimed.

Till's battered, disfigured body was found days later in a river, where it was weighted down with a heavy metal fan. The decision by his mother, Mamie Till Mobley, to open Till's casket for his funeral in Chicago demonstrated the horror of what had happened and added fuel to the civil rights movement.

Deborah Watts, a cousin of Till who leads the Emmett Till Legacy Foundation, said the unserved arrest warrant and memoir are new evidence that show Donham's involvement in the case.

"I truly believe these developments cannot be ignored by the authorities in Mississippi," she said.

Dale Killinger, a retired FBI agent who handled a review that ended without charges 15 years ago, said grand jurors should get a chance to review recent developments in the case.

COVID Emergency Ends Aug. 15

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

Republican-backed adjustments to North Carolina's budget were signed into law by Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper on Monday, ensuring that state workers will get slightly larger pay raises and that construction projects and state reserves will receive billions of dollars more than initially planned.

The signing marks the second year in a row that Cooper has accepted the GOP's comprehensive state government spending plan after vetoing budget bills in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The measure alters the second year of the two-year budget bill that he signed last November.

Cooper said the measure included "critical investments in education, economic develop-

ment, transportation and the state workforce." Cooper also announced that North Carolina's COVID-19 state of emergency would expire Aug. 15 after almost 2 1/2 years because of budget language that gives flexibility to his health department to respond to the pandemic.

Cooper had until Monday night—10 days after the House and Senate gave final legislative approval to their \$27.9 billion plan—to sign the bill or veto it, or it otherwise would become law without his signature.

Absent from the enacted measure is any reference to Medicaid expansion, which has been intertwined with Cooper—a big expansion booster—and budget negotiations since 2019. The Republican-controlled House and Senate approved separate, competing measures in June

that either accepted expansion or laid out a path to expansion, but no compromise was reached. But Cooper said advancements in Medicaid discussions contributed to his budget decision.

"Negotiations are occurring now and we are closer than ever to agreement on Medicaid expansion, therefore a veto of this budget would be counterproductive," Cooper added.

With more than 30 Democratic lawmakers ultimately voting for the agreement, Cooper also faced the pressure of a veto override vote by Republicans later this month that would be successful if as few as five Democrats stuck with them.

"We are pleased Gov. Cooper signed this responsible spending plan into law," House Speaker Tim Moore and Senate leader Phil Berger said in a joint state-

ment. "Moving forward, we are committed to working together to improve healthcare access and expand Medicaid, while providing the necessary safeguards to preserve the state's fiscal strength."

The measure, which covers the year starting July 1, decides what to do with well over \$6 billion in additional revenue collections by mid-2023 above and beyond what had been anticipated when the two-year budget was drawn up.

There are no supplement tax cuts beyond the income tax rate reduction that the two-year budget law already directed occurred this year and next. Republicans portrayed the measure as designed to keep the state on firm financial footing amid infla-

(See COVID, P. 2)

Green Party Sues NC Elections Board

By Hannah Schoenbaum

Associated Press/Report for America

The North Carolina Green Party filed suit against the state Board of Elections on Thursday over the board's refusal to allow party candidates to appear on the November ballot.

The lawsuit, filed Thursday in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, alleges the board violated the Green Party's right to due process by rejecting the petition without prior notice or an opportunity for the party to defend the integrity of its petitioning process.

"We are fighting for our democracy against this corrupt, lawless and partisan decision

by the State Board of Elections," said Matthew Hoh, the Green Party's unofficial U.S. Senate candidate. "This case will determine whether the political establishment can abuse its power to stop another party from participating in elections."

Two weeks ago, the board rejected the party's petition to appear on the ballot, saying its decision was based on an investigation that called into question the validity of more than 2,000 signatures. After county boards of elections validated just under 16,000 of the more than 22,000 signatures submitted by the Green Party—seemingly exceeding the 13,865-signature requirement—state board Executive

Director Karen Brinson Bell said several county officials identified irregularities.

She cited examples at a board meeting last month of petition sheets with nearly identical handwriting, incomplete personal information, duplicate names and deceased signatories.

The Green Party said the Democrat-driven 3-2 vote was a politically motivated decision. Green Party certification could divide progressive voters and clear a path for GOP victories in key races, including the tight U.S. Senate race between Democrat Cheri Beasley and Republican U.S. Rep. Ted Budd.

Bell said Thursday that some previously validated signatures

are now under review. The state board has learned that several county boards did not properly verify the signatures they received. They have been directed to do so by July 29, giving the state board enough time to reassess the Green Party's certification bid before the deadline to print ballots.

However, the investigation has already led the Green Party to miss the July 1 deadline to nominate candidates—a point of contention between the two Republican board members who voted in favor of certification and the three Democrats who voted in opposition.

The only way for Green

(See GREEN PARTY, P. 2)



NC PHARMACY ORDERED TO TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT DRUG ABUSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—A federal court has issued an order prohibiting a North Carolina pharmacy and its two pharmacists from dispensing controlled substances without taking steps to help ensure the drugs will not be abused, the U.S. Justice Department said Wednesday.

The consent decree resolves a complaint filed by the U.S. on July 7, alleging that Asheboro Drug Company and its pharmacists filed prescriptions in violation of the Controlled Substances Act, a department news release said. The pharmacy was also ordered to pay \$300,000 in civil penalties, which it agreed to do.

According to the complaint, the defendants dispensed prescription opioids while disregarding numerous signs of drug abuse, drug diversion and drug-seeking behavior. As an example, the complaint said the defendants filed prescriptions for dangerous combinations of drugs sought by drug abusers and significantly increased the risk of overdose.

The complaint also alleged that the defendants would at times dispense the same or similar prescriptions for multiple members of the same family, refill prescriptions early without justification, and ignored prescriptions from doctors who repeatedly wrote suspect prescriptions.

NORTH CAROLINA MAN SENT TO PRISON FOR \$2.5M TAX FRAUD

CHARLOTTE (AP)—A North Carolina man is going to prison following his conviction stemming from a \$2.5 million tax fraud scheme based on the preparation and filing of false tax returns, according to federal prosecutors.

Court documents and statements said Joseph Octave, 49, of Charlotte was the leader of a multi-year, multimillion-dollar tax fraud scheme involving hundreds of fraudulent tax returns, according to a news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office. Octave owned and operated a tax preparation business in Charlotte.

From 2014 through 2019, Octave used his business to execute a scheme in which he directed his employees to prepare and file fraudulent tax returns, prosecutors said. He also trained his employees on how to create the fraudulent returns to avoid IRS detection and provided them with scripts and cheat sheets.

Also, Octave instructed his employees not to give clients copies of their own tax returns and not to share any details beyond the total refund amount, the news release said.

In addition to the term of imprisonment, a judge ordered Octave to serve two years of supervised release and to pay approximately \$2.5 million in restitution.

VIDEO SHOWS PILOT LANDING STRICKEN SMALL PLANE ON HIGHWAY

BRYSON CITY (AP)—A Florida man who aspires to be a commercial pilot showed his skills in an emergency when he landed a single-engine aircraft on a four-lane North Carolina road, missing cars and power lines as he touched down.

Vincent Fraser was flying the plane July 3 when the aircraft began to lose engine power as he was checking out land he had purchased

Report: Rights Violations In South's Prisons

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Newswire

NEW YORK, N.Y.—The Southern Prisons Coalition, a group of civil and human rights organizations, submitted a new report on Friday to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on the devastating consequences of incarceration on Black people throughout the

southern United States.

With the long-term goal of eliminating all forms of racial discrimination in the criminal legal system, including the carceral system, the report describes the widespread, disparate harms resulting from the arrests, harsh prison sentences, and incarceration on Black communities.

The report also cites the devastating impacts of solitary confinement, prison labor, the school

to prison pipeline, and incarceration of parents on Black families.

On August 8, the UN will review the United States' compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination for the first time since 2014.

Among the ongoing stark racial disparities throughout prisons in the southern United States, Black people are five times more likely to be incarcer-

ated in state prisons.

In states like Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas, where Black communities comprise 38 percent of the total population, Black individuals account for as much as 67 percent of the total incarcerated population.

While incarcerated, Black people are more than eight times more likely to be placed in solitary confinement, and they are 10 times more likely to be held there for exceedingly long periods of time.

By submitting the report to the United Nations, the Southern Prisons Coalition hopes to solicit concrete recommendations from the UN Committee as well as commitments from the United States delegation about their plans to address systemic issues in the United States prison system, particularly in the South. According to the report, several states in the United States have also failed to meet several of the UN's Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of incarcerated people, including:

• Work should help to prepare incarcerated people for their release from prison, including life



NEW REPORT FINDS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SOUTH'S PRISONS

(See PRISONS, P. 2)

(See STATE BRIEFS, P. 2)

Business & Finance

Amazon Handed Ring Footage To Police Without Consent

By Haleluya Hadero

AP Business Writer

Amazon has provided Ring doorbell footage to law enforcement 11 times this year without the user's permission, a revelation that's bound to raise more privacy and civil liberty concerns about its video-sharing agreements with police departments across the country.

The disclosure came in a letter from the company that was made public Wednesday by U.S. Sen. Edward Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat who sent a separate letter to Amazon last month questioning Ring's surveillance practices and engagement with law enforcement.

Ring has said before it will not share customer information with police without consent, a warrant or due to "an exigent or emergency" circumstance. The 11 videos shared this year fell under the emergency provision, Amazon's letter said, the first time the company publicly shared such information. The letter, dated July 1, did not say which videos were shared with police.

Brian Huseman, Amazon's vice president for public policy, wrote in the letter that in each instance, "Ring made a good-faith determination that there was an

imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to a person requiring disclosure of information without delay."

In such cases, Huseman wrote Ring "reserves the right to respond immediately to urgent law enforcement requests for information," adding the company makes a determination as to when to share video footage without user consent based on information provided to it in an emergency request form and circumstances described by law enforcement.

Some prior requests from law enforcement have raised concerns about how police might be attempting to use Ring footage. Last year, the non-profit digital rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation reported the Los Angeles Police Department requested Ring footage of Black Lives Matter protests from users in 2020.

In a statement, Markey's office said the findings show a close relationship between Ring and law enforcement and a proliferation of police using the platform.

Amazon said in its letter 2,161 law enforcement agencies are enrolled in Ring's Neighbors app, a forum for residents to share suspicious videos captured by their home security cameras.

That number represents a five-fold increase since November 2019, according to the senator's office.

"As my ongoing investigation into Amazon illustrates, it has become increasingly difficult for the public to move, assemble, and converse in public without being tracked and recorded," Markey said in a statement.

Among other things, the senator's statement also criticized the company for not clarifying the distance Ring products can capture audio recordings. The company had said in its response letter what Ring captures "depends on many conditions, including device placement and environmental conditions."

The Ring disclosure comes as Amazon is facing broader antitrust scrutiny in Congress about its e-commerce business, and accusations of undercutting merchants that sell on its platform by making "knock-offs," or very similar products, and boosting their presence on its site. Markey and several other Democratic lawmakers are also pushing for a bill that prohibits the use of biometric technology by federal agencies and tie federal grant funding to states and localities on the condition they put a moratorium on the use of such technology.



ONLY EMERGENCIES—Amazon promises that its Ring doorbell footage will not be shared without the user's consent except for "exigent or emergency" circumstance. It says that the 11 times it did so this year were emergencies.

GM To Build 500 Charging Stations

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

DETROIT, Mich. (AP)—A major automaker, large truck stop chain and an electric vehicle charging company are proposing a network that would put charging plugs at 50-mile intervals along U.S. highways.

General Motors, Pilot Travel Centers and EVgo said Thursday they will build 2,000 charging stalls at "up to" 500 Pilot Flying J sites across the nation.

The companies wouldn't answer questions about the cost or how much each will pay, but a statement says they're counting on government grant money and programs from utilities to help put the network in place.

Construction will start this summer with the first chargers operating sometime in 2023, GM spokesman Philip Lienert said. The network should be finished in a couple of years, he said.

GM said the network would be along highways to enable interstate travel.

When finished, the chargers will help the Biden administration move toward its goal of 500,000 stations nationwide by 2030 as it tries to get people

to switch away from gasoline-powered vehicles to fight climate change.

Bipartisan infrastructure legislation approved by Congress ended up providing just half of the \$15 billion that Biden had envisioned to fulfill a campaign promise of 500,000 charging stations by 2030.

Even so, the \$7.5 billion for charging stations has been a catalyst for industry investments, said National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy. "It's exciting to see leading companies respond by setting their own ambitious goals, and investing in a convenient, reliable, and affordable nationwide charging network," she said.

Biden's Build Back Better proposal aimed to fill the gap but is stalled in Congress.

Administration officials now say the infrastructure law will help "pave" the way for up to 500,000 charging outlets by 2030.

That's different than charging stations, which could have several outlets. They say private investments could help fill the gap. Currently there are nearly 124,000 public EV outlets in the U.S. at over 49,000 stations.

The Department of Transporta-

tion said that \$5 billion of the \$7.5 billion for EV chargers will go to states, which can partner with other groups. The remaining \$2.5 billion would go to competitive grants for charging projects. No grants have been awarded yet.

The new charging network is a step toward building out a charging network that will make the public more comfortable traveling in EVs, said S&P Global Mobility Principal Analyst Stephanie Brinley.

"The infrastructure of electric vehicles needs to be a sort of combination of locations like Pilot," she said. "It probably needs this level of support from many different voices to make it work."

Pilot says it has more than 750 locations in 44 U.S. states and five Canadian provinces.

GM has set a goal of building only electric passenger vehicles by 2035. It has pledged to have 30 electric vehicle models for sale globally by 2025.

It has promised to invest nearly \$750 million in chargers, but wouldn't say how much of that has been spent.

GM owners would get discounts and exclusive charging reservations on the network, the company said.

China's Economy Shrinks By 2.6 Percent During Its Virus Shutdowns

By Joe McDonald

AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP)—China's economy contracted in the three months ending in June compared with the previous quarter after Shanghai and other cities shut down to fight coronavirus outbreaks, but the government said a "stable recovery" is under way after businesses reopened.

The world's second-largest economy shrank by 2.6 percent, down from the January-March period's already weak 1.4 percent, official data showed Friday. Compared with a year earlier, which can hide recent fluctuations, growth slid to 0.4 percent

from the earlier quarter's 4.8 percent.

Activity was "much weaker than expected," Rajiv Biswas of S&P Global Market Intelligence said in a report.

Asian stock markets were mixed following the news. Hong Kong was down 0.8 percent at mid-morning while Shanghai, Tokyo and Seoul gained.

Anti-virus controls shut down Shanghai, site of the world's busiest port, and other industrial centers starting in late March, fueling concerns global trade and manufacturing might be disrupted. Millions of families were confined to their homes, depressing consumer spending.

Factories and offices were allowed to start reopening in May, but economists say it will be weeks or months before activity is back to normal. Economists and business groups say China's trading partners will feel the impact of shipping disruptions over the next few months.

"The resurgence of the pandemic was effectively contained," the statistics bureau said in a statement. "The national economy registered a stable recovery."

Data on factory output, consumer spending and other activity suggest overall growth was even weaker than the headline figure, Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a re-

port.

"Even accounting for June's strength, the data are consistent with negative y/y (year-on-year) growth last quarter," Evans-Pritchard wrote. "This isn't the first time that the official GDP figures have seemingly understated the extent of an economic downturn."

The slump hurts China's trading partners by depressing demand for imported oil, food and consumer goods.

China's infection numbers are relatively low, but Beijing responded to its biggest outbreak since the 2020 start of the pandemic with a "zero-COVID" policy that aims to isolate every person who tests positive. The ruling party has switched to quarantining individual buildings or neighborhoods with infections but those restrictions covered areas with millions of people.

Repeated shutdowns and uncertainty about business conditions have devastated entrepreneurs who generate China's new wealth and jobs. Small retailers and restaurants have closed. Others say they are struggling to stay afloat.

Cheng Hong, a mother of one who owns the Qifei Travel Agency in Shijiazhuang, southwest of Beijing, said business is down more than 80 percent.

"I almost couldn't hold on, but I am lucky to see the start of a recovery," said Cheng.

The ruling Communist Party is promising tax refunds, free rent and other aid to get companies back on their feet, but most forecasters expect China to fail to hit the ruling party's 5.5 percent growth target this year.

Other major economies report

growth compared with the previous quarter, which makes their levels look lower than China. Beijing for decades reported only growth compared with the previous year, which hid short-term fluctuations, but has started to release quarter-on-quarter figures.

Forecasters say Beijing is using cautious, targeted stimulus instead of across-the-board spending, a strategy that will take longer to show results. Chinese leaders worry too much spending might push up politically sensitive housing costs or corporate debt they worry is dangerously high.

Growth for the first half of the year was 2.5 percent over a year earlier, one of the weakest levels in the past three decades.

Retail sales were off 0.7 percent from a year earlier in the

first half after plunging 11 percent in April.

Song Haixia, a shopkeeper who sells food and cigarettes in the northern city of Taiyuan, said sales have fallen by up to 70 percent to as little as 300 yuan (\$45) a day. She said migrant workers who were among her customers were driven away by anti-virus measures.

"People are just not making money," said Song, 45, the mother of two children. "I am not very optimistic about future prospects."

Investment in factories, real estate and other fixed assets climbed 6.1 percent, reflecting the ruling party's effort to stimulate growth by boosting spending on public works construction and ordering state-owned companies to spend more.

Classifieds



ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety has the following contract in Granville County out for bid: C-XXXX C.A. Dillon Youth Development Center—Mini Split HVAC. The bid opening is scheduled for: Thursday, 08/11/2022. To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/AGENCY/PDF/14923500.pdf>



IT HAS BEEN A TOUGH COUPLE OF MONTHS IN CHINA DUE TO LOCKDOWNS

Opinion



Mercenaries Today: The Wagner Group

By Lawrence Wittner

SUNY/Albany

For many years, substantial military operations have been conducted by mercenaries, ranging from professional soldiers hired to fight wars for European potentates in the 14th century to the combat forces of Blackwater, a private company employed by the U.S. government to undertake violent activities in the “War on Terror” of the early 21st century.

Today, the Wagner Group, a shadowy Russian company engaged in the thriving mercenary business, is perhaps the leading private enterprise partner in global military ventures. Employing as many as 10,000 military personnel, it is headquartered in the Russian town of Molino, right beside a military base run by the GRU, Russia’s military intelligence agency. It relies heavily on the Russian government’s approval and military infrastructure for its far-flung operations.

The Wagner Group was reportedly founded in 2014 by Dmitri Utkin, a Russian military veteran who so admired Hitler that he named the mercenary organization after the führer’s favorite composer. The financial backing for the Wagner Group, however, came from Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch with close ties to President Vladimir Putin. With many Russian veterans eager to pay off debts and secure employment, recruitment proceeded rapidly. The Wagner Group’s first significant operation came later that year, as the Russian government dispatched about a thousand of the company’s armed soldiers, wearing unmarked uniforms, into the Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine to bolster an uprising of pro-Russian separatists.

In this 2014 Ukraine invasion and in the mercenary ventures that followed, the outsourcing of a military project to the Wagner Group provided two major advantages to the Russian government. The first was deniability. In these shadowy circumstances, the Kremlin could deny that it was staging a military attack upon another nation. Furthermore, if anything went wrong with an operation—for example, if there were significant casualties among Russian soldiers—the Kremlin could avoid domestic political repercussions. When a soldier worked for Wagner, recalled Marat Gabidullin, a former Russian commander for the company, he was on his own, because his job didn’t have an official existence. With the company not registered in Russia or anywhere, such a person exists “in a legal vacuum.” That also meant, Gabidullin added, that soldiers were relieved of any consequences for their behavior, for a person who “doesn’t exist” can do anything.

Indeed, freed from legal responsibility and subsequently dispatched farther afield, members of this covert Russian army violated human rights with impunity. In Syria, the Wagner Group’s soldiers, fighting to maintain the Assad dictatorship, were filmed laughing as they used a sledgehammer to break the bones of a Syrian army deserter before dismembering his body and cutting off his head. In the Central African Republic, UN investigators reported that the Wagner Group’s forces tortured, raped, and murdered civilians, forcibly recruited child soldiers, and engaged in widespread looting. In Libya, Wagner mercenaries reportedly booby-trapped civilian homes with explosives attached to toilet seats and teddy bears. According to Human Rights Watch, between 800 and 1,200 Wagner Group operatives in that country, working to install a friendly warlord in power, planted antipersonnel landmines in the suburbs of Tripoli that killed or maimed large numbers of civilians.

The Wagner Group’s armed forces have been particularly active in Africa, where, in addition to terrorizing the Central African Republic and Libya, they have been operating in Mozambique, Sudan, and Mali. According to an extensive report on May 31, 2022 in the *New York Times*, these forces “ally with embattled political and military leaders who can pay for their services in cash, or with lucrative mining concessions for precious minerals like gold, diamonds, and uranium.”

In Mali, where the ruling military junta employed Wagner’s armed forces to fight rebels, they swooped down in helicopters on a crowded marketplace in Moura in late March 2022, and—in command of the junta’s soldiers—seized large numbers of civilians. Over the next five days, they looted houses, held villagers captive, and executed masses of them. According to the *Times*, the Russians “marauded through the town, indiscriminately killing people in houses, stealing jewelry, and confiscating cellphones to eliminate any visual evidence.” Witnesses and analysts said that, by conservative estimates, the death toll in Moura was between 300 and 400 people, mostly civilians.

Responding to questions about the massacre, Prigozhin, Wagner’s manager, praised Mali’s current leader, its military, and its actions in Moura. He also denied the presence of Wagner operatives in Mali, declaring it “a legend” that the Wagner Group even existed. But Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov remarked on Italian television in May that the Wagner Group was, indeed, present in Mali “on a commercial basis,” providing “security services.” According to a French senior diplomat in Mali, about a thousand Wagner mercenaries are stationed there in at least 15 military bases, security outposts, and checkpoints.

Not surprisingly, Wagner operatives have also been deployed to assist with Russia’s 2022 war in Ukraine. A few weeks before the invasion, many veterans of past Wagner operations were invited to join what was advertised as a “picnic” in that land. To provide the tainted Wagner forces with deep cover, however, the mercenary units were given new names.

Not to be outdone in the mercenary game, Blackwater’s founder, Erik Prince, suggested to U.S. President Joe Biden that he dispatch aging U.S. fighter jets and retired U.S. pilots to Ukraine to defend it from the Russian invasion. But Biden rejected the scheme.

Like the activities of other mercenary enterprises, those of the Wagner Group continue the historic practice of hiring soldiers of fortune to wage war. And, like the problem of war, the problem of mercenary operations seems unlikely to be solved without a substantial strengthening of international security institutions, among them the United Nations.

Are the nations of the world willing to take this step? Or would they prefer to live with the disasters being produced by today’s mercenaries?

Dr. Lawrence Wittner is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the author of *Confronting the Bomb* (Stanford University Press).



Don’t Expand NATO. Disband It.

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

“The decisions we have taken in Madrid,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said as a summit of the alliance’s members closed in Madrid on June 30, “will ensure that our Alliance continues to preserve peace, prevent conflict, and protect our people and our values.”

Decisions taken at the summit include inviting Sweden and Finland to join as NATO’s 31st and 32nd member states, an increase in “high readiness” forces to more than 300,000, more money in general, and of course more money for non-member state Ukraine in its conflict with Russia.

None of these, of course, will “preserve peace” or “prevent conflict,” and given the last 30 years of the alliance’s history, even the notion that they’ll “protect” the people of NATO member states is dubious. That’s not what NATO does these days.

What NATO does these days is constantly attempt to remake the world in the image of “liberal democracy,” very loosely defined as whatever the organization’s member regimes happen to want at any given moment.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and dissolution of the Warsaw Pact—NATO’s original betes noires—in 1991, the alliance has grown like Topsy with new member states located far from the North Atlantic, all while launching or joining in numerous wars of choice in the Balkans, in the Middle East, in Central Asia, and in Africa.

Characterizing NATO as a “collective security” or “defense” coalition these days is pure fiction. It’s an alliance for global conquest and US/European hegemony, and that’s all it is. The criterion for NATO military intervention is no longer, per Article 5 of its charter, an actual attack on a member state, but rather any refusal—actual or potential—to slavishly obey the edicts of the alliance or its heavy-weight regimes.

Think what you may of Vladimir Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine, his stated concerns about Ukraine potentially joining this violent supranational gang and bringing it right up to Russia’s border were completely understandable. That war might have been avoided if not for NATO’s obsession with constant expansion.

NATO is a clear, present, and constant danger to world peace. It outlived its notional usefulness as anything else more than three decades ago.

The United States in particular has no conceivable legitimate interest in remaining a NATO member. With no closely located enemies of military significance, and with the power to project more force “over the horizon” than any other power on Earth at need, the only things it gets out of NATO membership are the kinds of foreign entanglements George Washington and Thomas Jefferson warned it against.

As for the European powers, if they want to form a military alliance, perhaps under the European Union umbrella, well, that’s their business. They should do it at their own expense and with their own military personnel, not with American blood and treasure at stake.

The first step in disbanding NATO and eliminating it as a threat to global peace is for the U.S. to depart the alliance. The sooner the better.

Thomas L. Knapp (Twitter: @thomaslknapp) is director and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism (thegarrisoncenter.org). He lives and works in north central Florida.



The Nuclear Superpowers And True Self-Interest

By Winslow Myers

War Preventive Initiative

A number of nuclear strategy experts have agreed that the only sensible response to China’s alarming new buildup of nuclear weapons is for the U.S. itself to build more and better weapons. The apparent purpose of this buildup on our part is first to ensure that our deterrent is ironclad, and second it is argued as the only viable way to force the Chinese (and perhaps even the Russians, eventually) to the arms control table. After all, it worked before, when President Reagan outsped the Russians and helped end the first cold war.

There are three factors suggesting that this supposedly thoughtful establishment policy is performatively contradictory and growing more so year by year, decade by decade.

First, there is the dark paradox of having the weapons at the ready on hair-trigger precisely so that they will never be used. It is already a kind of miracle that we have been able to make it through decades of nuclear confrontation without making a fatal mistake (though the catalog of known near-misses is profoundly sobering); how much longer can our good fortune last? As the delivery vehicles move from supersonic to hypersonic, windows of decision become ever smaller and opportunities for misinterpretation ever larger.

Second, nuclear winter. Carefully designed computer models predict that it would only take about a hundred detonations over large cities to raise tons of soot into the upper atmosphere sufficient to cause a global freeze that would destroy most agriculture for a decade. This inconvenient truth not only cancels out any advantage afforded by competitive numbers of warheads but also throws deterrence strategy in general into disarray. If one hundred weapons can kill the planet, what’s the point of thousands more?

And third, opportunity costs. Together, the three superpowers are planning trillions in spending to upgrade their arsenals both in terms of quantity and “quality” (reliability, speed, ease of launch, variety, precision etc.) when the world is crying out for funds to feed the starving, find homes for refugees, vaccinate against COVID, get beyond fossil fuels, and heal a degraded environment.

If nuclear weapons could resolve the present tensions over Taiwan and in Ukraine, someone would presumably already have used them. But we all know that these weapons are completely useless as part of a winning military strategy. The game is up, but because of the international obsession with credibility, the game continues, no matter how meaningless, crazy, immoral, criminal, silly, and stupid ordinary citizens around the globe are convinced that it is.

From the institutional perspective of nuclear nations, obviously the system of nuclear deterrence is not seen as stupid, because each nuclear power is certain it would be subject to blackmail if it showed weakness by any unilateral disarmament initiative. Without the U.S. nuclear deterrent, perhaps the Chinese would more likely risk invading and subsuming Taiwan, or Putin would be even less restrained in his push for empire than at present. These suppositions do not even include the self-perpetuating momentum provided by the profit motive of the arms manufacturers.

The nuclear nations are stuck in a system which has no exit, no good outcome—unless they realize their common interest in change. As of today 86 countries have signed, and 66 nations have come to their senses and ratified, the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, good news for all of us.

What will drive the nine nuclear nations toward the realization that they and their citizens share together a probability of annihilation unless they move together toward reciprocal, verifiable arms control? But someone must make the first move that initiates a possible virtuous circle. Why not the U.S.? As former Secretary of Defense Perry suggests, we could retire our entire land-based fleet of ballistic missiles without any loss of security.

The Chinese are said to be unwilling to engage in disarmament talks at the moment. But things can change as the self-interest of nations changes. And every day that the nine cling to their bombs, some other nations feel compelled to seek them.

Strategists know that the arms race and the unfolding of current events in general is an ever-surprising unstable state. But it is clearly difficult for them to look down the time-stream and see that unless we change the nuclear paradigm by aggressively building agreement around the futility of the game, there is a waterfall ahead toward which the world is drifting. Nuclear arms control will inevitably take place in a context of conflicts large and small, including apparent Chinese intransigence and continuing war in Ukraine. But once strategists disenthrall themselves of the supposed necessities of deterrence, a new picture of a shared self-interest in moving beyond the nuclear age may come into focus.

Winslow Myers author of *Living Beyond War: A Citizen’s Guide, serves on the Advisory Board of the War Preventive Initiative.*



21st Century Citizenship: Four Civic Skills We Need To Keep Our Democracy

By Melinda Burrell

National Association for Community Mediation

As primaries roll out around the country, we’re tracking voter turnout. Raised on Schoolhouse Rock’s cartoon civics lessons, I know that being a good American means voting.

Those 1970’s cartoons weren’t wrong. Voting is the most fundamental act of democratic citizenship. That’s why it has been fiercely contested throughout our history.

But now we’re in the 21st century, deluged by information, increasingly divided, with few models of bipartisanship.

Democracy now requires much more than voting. What should a 21st century Schoolhouse Rocks teach?

Most fundamentally, we need to be skilled seekers of information. In this era of deepfakes, bots, and fragmenting media platforms, the ability to access and evaluate information is key. Algorithms push us ever more deeply into one point of view. To address multifaceted 21st century issues, we need deliberately to seek a variety of information, including backstories about controversial events, from differing sources to construct the whole picture.

We must process information skillfully, getting around our inherent neurobiological biases. For example, we naturally lap up information that confirms what we already think but ignore information that challenges our world view. We also are wired for double standards: we attribute another person’s bad behavior to their personality (“she’s late because she’s disrespectful”) while giving ourselves a pass for the same behavior (“I’m late because traffic was bad”). Understanding these natural biases lets us challenge ourselves to explore issues more fully.

Understanding biases promotes a third democratic skill: truly talking with one another. Research, including my own, shows that liberals and conservatives alike often experience cross-divide conversations as an assault on their values. Yet most people also believe these conversations are important and would like to have them to feel connected and informed.

Constructive conversations require listening and asking good questions. Political scientist Andrew Dobson describes listening as our “democratic deficit.” We rarely listen closely to the other side. This undermines our ability to create policy which is seen as a legitimate outcome of democratic debate. Nor do we ask enough genuinely curious questions to learn why others think what they do to help find common ground. As Steve Benjamin, former head of the National Conference of Mayors, noted, “We all suffer from some degree of experiential blindness and need to become experts at learning about others’ perspectives.”

Perhaps the most important—and most difficult—21st century citizenship skill is maintaining relationships with people who think differently. For a democracy to function, we need not only a robust marketplace of ideas, but also the ability to work together for policy that meets widespread needs. A conservative interviewee in my study remarked, “Everybody is so comfortable being polarized—they are not happy unless they’re mad.”

It’s challenging to hold conflicting feelings about people, appreciating their good qualities while disagreeing on politics. But perhaps we make it harder than it is.

Research shows we overestimate both how much the other party dislikes us as well as how much they disagree with us about policy. Asking genuinely curious questions and remembering what we appreciate just might help us find that we have more in common than we think. Our 21st century democracy needs us to develop these skills.

Melinda Burrell, Ph.D., @MelindaCBurrell, was a humanitarian aid worker and now trains on the neuroscience of communication and conflict. She is on the board of the National Association for Community Mediation, which offers resources on cross-divide engagement.