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Columbia Protests

Biden urges 'peaceful' protests, says National Guard unnecessary

News Nation, May 2, 2024:

(NewsNation) — President Joe Biden urged those involved with ongoing college protests over the war in Gaza to remain peaceful, adding that he doesn't think a National Guard presence is necessary.

The president addressed the nation from the White House on Thursday morning, denouncing antisemitism and racism. The protests haven't swayed his positions on the region, he said.

"Dissent is essential to Democracy, but dissent must never lead to disorder," Biden said.

Pro-Palestinian protesters on campuses including Columbia University, Yale and the University of California, Los Angeles have been calling for the schools to divest from Israel.

Earlier this week, police arrested 292 people — 173 at The City College of New York and 119 at Columbia — NYPD Chief of Patrol John Chell said during a news conference Wednesday.

“There’s the right to protest but not the right to cause chaos,” Biden said. “Let’s be clear about this as well: There should be no place on any campus and no place in America for antisemitism and threats of violence ... it’s simply wrong. There’s no place for racism in America.”

Political figures including former President Donald Trump have been critical of Biden for not speaking on the matter sooner.

“This isn’t a moment for politics,” Biden said. “It’s a moment for clarity.”

<https://www.newsnationnow.com/politics/biden-college-protests-remarks/>

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Hochul defends use of police force to quell NYC college protests

North Country Public Radio, May 1, 2024 ::

New York Governor Kathy Hochul on Wednesday defended the use of New York Police Department forces to quell increasingly violent student protests at Columbia University and the City College of New York. She says students who aren’t protesting have rights, too.

The police action Tuesday night included the storming of a barricaded Hamilton Hall on Columbia’s campus. It resulted in around 300 arrests of students and other pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrating against the war in Gaza, and the school’s financial ties to the state of Israel.

Hochul, who praised the NYPD for acting professionally and fairly, says students have a First Amendment right to speak their minds. But she says when it devolves into violence, vandalism, destruction of property, and harassment, a line has been crossed.

“Let me be clear: There is no circumstance where violence or vandalism is tolerated or acceptable, whether you’re on a college campus or walking the streets of New York,” the governor said. “Targeting Jewish students for harassment or abuse

because of the actions of the Israeli government is also antisemitic and wrong; glorifying the acts of Hamas on October 7th is reprehensible.”

The governor says racist or Islamophobic rhetoric is also not acceptable.

Hochul says most of the students on the campuses just want to finish their studies, take their exams, and, in the case of college seniors, have an in-person graduation. Many college seniors today saw their high school graduations canceled because of the COVID pandemic.

“Everyone is entitled to participate in a live commencement ceremony,” she said.

Hochul says State Police are willing to help if local law enforcement in communities where protests are occurring requests them. But she says she does not envision sending in the New York National Guard at this time.

Hochul also says she has no sympathy for students who might be expelled for illegal behavior while protesting. She says they knew about the consequences and did it anyway.

<https://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/story/49759/20240501/hochul-defends-use-of-police-force-to-quell-nyc-college-protests>

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Is New York Gov. Kathy Hochul considering sending in the National Guard to respond to on-campus protests?

The Recount, April 30, 2024 ::

New York Governor Kathy Hochul on Tuesday deferred to the universities and localities when she was asked whether she was considering sending in the National Guard to respond to on-campus protests at Columbia University and New York University.

“What I've said all along is that we'll ensure the safety of all students, but the primary responsibility falls with the university,” Hochul said.

The New York Police Department has officers stationed outside the university's entrances, but police remain off campus. Officials have said campus grounds are private property, so officers cannot respond unless they are requested or if there is a threat to public safety.

“NYPD has over 36,000 well-trained professionals who have already been engaged, who are available. So, if the NYPD enters into a circumstance that they cannot handle, which I do not ever foresee, we have state police and other resources available,” Hochul said. “But the primary responsibility does fall with the policing agencies where a municipality is or locality is.”

Overnight, dozens of protesters broke in and took over a campus building at Columbia University, barricading the entrances and unfurling a Palestinian flag out a window. The protesters defied a Monday deadline set by the university to clear an on-campus encampment or face disciplinary action.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/york-gov-kathy-hochul-considering-155143801.html?guccounter=1>

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Emergency Response

Trump says he'll use National Guard to deport migrants, doubling down on anti-immigration rhetoric

Associated Press, April 30, 2024 ::

THIS ITEM IS PROVIDED FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump says he'd use the National Guard as part of efforts to deport millions of migrants across the country if he's reelected, signaling that he's doubling down on anti-immigration rhetoric that fueled his previous rise to power.

Trump's comments came during a lengthy in-person and telephone interview with Time magazine earlier this month. The accompanying story was published online on Tuesday.

Trump didn't say how exactly he'd carry out the deportation operations and what role the National Guard would play in them. Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for president, said he wasn't opposed to using active duty military if needed but that he thought the National Guard would do the job.

“If I thought things were getting out of control, I would have no problem using the military,” he said. “We have to have safety in our country. We have to have law and order in our country. And whichever gets us there, but I think the National Guard will do the job.”

U.S. military forces — both National Guard and active duty — have historically been used at the border to back up immigration personnel. However, using National Guard forces, or active-duty military, to help directly with deporting migrants, especially in the interior of the country, would be a drastic escalation of their use in the immigration sphere and would likely run into legal challenges.

During Trump's first term, the Department of Homeland Security considered using National Guard troops to round up unauthorized immigrants but the plans ultimately never came to fruition.

Presidents have used troops, often National Guard forces, to bolster border security in different ways. President George W. Bush called on National Guard troops to bolster security along the southwestern border in "Operation Jumpstart," while "Operation Phalanx" under President Barack Obama also used National Guard troops in similar ways.

Presidents Joe Biden and Donald Trump have also used active duty troops and National Guard forces to bolster border security and assist with immigration-related tasks.

But those forces at the border have been used in specific, restricted ways like data entry, surveillance or warehouse support or to provide logistical support in ways that don't interact directly with migrants and are designed to free up immigration personnel to do their jobs.

When it comes to finding and removing people from the country, that's generally the purview of the Enforcement and Removals Operations arm of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. They identify, arrest, detain and remove people who have been determined to not have the right to stay in the country.

This can often be a lengthy and expensive process because removals are often done by airplane and because many countries don't agree to take back migrants from their countries.

Federal law generally prohibits the use of active-duty service members for law enforcement inside the U.S., unless specifically authorized by Congress.

When Trump was asked specifically whether he would override restrictions on using the U.S. military against civilians, Trump said the people that would be targeted aren't civilians.

"These are people that aren't legally in our country. This is an invasion of our country. An invasion like probably no country has ever seen before," Trump told the magazine.

Trump has made cracking down on immigration a centerpiece of his reelection campaign, repeating a strategy that worked for him when he first ran for office.

He's accused migrants of "poisoning the blood of the country" and referred to people in the U.S. illegally who are suspected of committing crimes as "animals." He's vowed to end birthright citizenship and reimpose his travel ban that originally targeted seven Muslim-majority countries.

<https://www.mychamplainvalley.com/news/politics/ap-trump-says-hell-use-national-guard-to-deport-migrants-doubling-down-on-anti-immigration-rhetoric/>

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Former generals warn of more Guard use in domestic, political missions

Army Times, May 1, 2024::

THIS ITEM IS PROVIDED FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES.

The uptick of non-traditional or politically charged missions presents problems for troops, four retired National Guard generals said at an event on Monday that was put on by the Brookings Institution and Count Every Hero in Washington, D.C.

Panelists argued that deploying the National Guard for some state missions, while Guardsmen are in state active duty status, threatens readiness and training for more traditional mission sets. State active duty status pertains to state-funded missions controlled by a state's governor mostly meant for a state or national emergency.

"We don't traditionally train for some of these one-off missions," said retired Air Force Gen. Craig McKinley, the former chief of the National Guard Bureau. "When we send our men and women downrange, we want to make sure they understand the mission. How do you train, organize and equip yourself for these one-off missions? It creates some tension, some conflict."

State active duty differs from other statuses, such as Title 10, which can be used to surge troops considered part of the military at the federal level during wartime, or Title 32, meant to train and equip federally funded troops under the direction of the state's governor.

In March, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul deployed 750 Guardsmen to conduct bag checks in the New York City subway system following a number of high-profile crimes.

Some school district officials in February asked Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey to restore order in an unruly high school by sending in troops, according to the Associated Press, and New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham in January 2022 called in the National Guard to serve as substitute teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“If we overuse them for other things, like bus drivers, school teachers, prison guards and all the rest, that’s not really what the thought was behind the creation of the National Guard,” said retired Air Force Gen. Joseph Lengyel, another former chief of the National Guard Bureau. “[Domestic operations were about] saving lives, protecting property and helping restore order if you need it. Some of these other things are new, growing and emerging missions.”

That diversification of missions can impact morale and readiness, the retired generals warned.

“The call for those nonconventional missions comes more and more frequently,” said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Allyson Solomon, the former Adjutant General of Maryland. “It’s about sustainability. How can you sustain a force as a reserve force for the United States active duty, as an individual who needs to be prepared to respond when you’re unable to find the time or have the time to do the training that you need in order to be fully prepared?”

But sometimes National Guard missions challenge federal authority.

The Pentagon surged 1,500 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border in May 2023 to support Customs and Border Patrol personnel. But Texas Gov. Greg Abbott’s mission Operation Lone Star, which started in 2021, has caused jurisdictional headaches between Guard units and federal border protection officials.

Confusion over jurisdiction led to a standoff between federal forces and the Texas National Guard at a park in Eagle Pass, Texas earlier this year.

Since its formation, Operation Lone Star has been rife with poor morale among troops, delays in payment and subpar living conditions, along with a wave of troop suicides, a Military Times and Texas Tribune joint investigation found.

Some of the consequences of these “enduring missions” differ from other deployments overseas, Lengyel said. He explained that, when deployed to the Middle East, unlike the southern border, Guard troops were at least sent to an Army garrison already built and ready to take care of troops.

“It’s hard for some units to do these kinds of [missions],” he said.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/former-generals-warn-more-guard-155117795.html>

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Mitch McConnell opposes calling in National Guard on anti-Israel protests: ‘Let’s see if university presidents can get control’

New York Post, April 26, 2024::

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell on Thursday argued against sending in the National Guard to remove disruptive anti-Israel protesters from college campuses, saying he wants to give university presidents more time to resolve the matter.

“What needs to happen, at least at the beginning, is these university presidents need to get control of the situation, allow free speech, and push back against antisemitism,” the Kentucky Republican said of the protests that have caused turmoil on college campuses from coast-to-coast.

“I thought that was largely gone in this country, but we’ve seen a number of young people who are actually anti-Semitic,” McConnell continued, during an interview with “Face the Nation” moderator Margaret Brennan. “Why don’t they all sit down and have a civil conversation rather than trying to dominate the talk?”

“And I think the first line of defense is these university presidents.”

When pressed on whether he agrees with House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) and other Republicans who have demanded that National Guard troops be sent in to quell the protests, McConnell signaled that, at least for now, it would be better for university leaders to engage with demonstrators.

Cops arrest 200 anti-Israel protesters at college campuses across US — while Columbia leaders dither

“Let’s see if these university presidents can get control of the situation,” McConnell said. “They ought to be able to do that. Civil discussion is what college education is supposed to be about. I’d be interested in hearing the anti-Semitic people explain the justification for that kind of talk.”

Anti-Israel protesters at Columbia University’s Manhattan campus have erected a tent city, leading administrators to limit access to the Ivy League school and forcing students to finish off the spring semester in a hybrid learning environment.

The demonstrators face an early Friday morning deadline to reach a deal with school officials to vacate the lawn they have occupied for the last several days.

Anti-Israel protests Columbia University

“My intention is to call President Biden after we leave here and share with him what we have seen with our own two eyes and demand that he take action,” Johnson said after visiting the school Wednesday.

”If this is not contained quickly, and if this — these threats and intimidation — are not stopped there is an appropriate time for the National Guard,” the House speaker added.

“Why hasn’t Joe Biden called in the National Guard?” Rep. Byron Donalds (R-Fla.) voiced on X

“Send in the National Guard to protect Jewish students,” Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) has demanded, referring to the protesters as “bogie jihadists.”

“A responsible president should send in the National Guard to protect Jewish students like Eisenhower did to protect Black students from Democrat segregationists,” Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) argued.

Several Columbia-inspired protests have sparked up at other universities, including at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Southern California.

In Texas, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott said Wednesday that the Texas National Guard was “aware and prepared” to respond to protests at UT-Austin, but Guardsmen were ultimately not sent in.

Abbott said he believes “all of the protesters” belong in jail.

<https://nypost.com/2024/04/25/us-news/mitch-mcconnell-opposes-calling-in-national-guard-on-anti-israel-protesters/>+

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New York Air National Guard

The drone industry is booming in Central New York

City and State, April 29, 2024 ::

A military presence in Syracuse and a grant funding program have helped companies start up and thrive.

While much of the discussion around the Central New York economy has been centered on semiconductor giant Micron opening a new plant outside of Syracuse, the unmanned aerial system, or drone, industry and the growing advanced air

mobility industry have been cementing themselves as key parts of the region's economic ecosystem.

A drone corridor has emerged with the placement of one of seven Federal Aviation Administration designated facilities known as UAS test sites for drones in Oneida County. Sprouting up near the decade-old test site is a state-funded business accelerator program for drone companies and a growing number of educational initiatives to support the growing industry. "New York state is the place to be for what is next in aviation," said Kara Jones, director of Genius NY, the accelerator program based in Syracuse.

At the heart of the corridor is the test site at Griffiss International Airport in Rome. The 240-square-mile test area was originally just a 50-mile corridor between Griffiss and Syracuse Hancock International Airport. Now, the larger facility is overseen by NUAIR, a nonprofit, founded to develop the test site and industry in New York. NUAIR also launched the Center for Excellence at the Syracuse airport to manage the expanded test area and develop new economic, safety and regulatory models for the region, and to work with national and international clients.

There is also a military presence at Syracuse Hancock, drone programs run by Le Moyne College and Syracuse public schools, as well as a growing corporate base.

Funding has been a huge catalyst for the corridor's growth. Genius NY, started in 2017 and seeded by \$5 million annually in Empire State Development funds, has funded seven cohorts of five drone-related companies. The companies were selected in a competition with the grand prize winner receiving \$1 million and the other four receiving \$500,000 each. During a one-year residency in Syracuse, companies receive mentorship and business development assistance from the program.

"They partner with each other," she told City & State. "Since we are focused on a niche industry, there is a lot of collaboration."

Jones said about 40% of the companies that have gone through the Genius NY program have stayed in Central New York, with those that depart the region continuing to work with those that stay. She credited the FAA test site for giving the region its appeal with drone companies, as well as an existing aviation industry. The presence of the military at Syracuse Hancock, namely the 174th Attack Wing of the New York Air National Guard, have played a part, according to Jones. She said many companies that apply for the Genius NY program are attracted to a "synergy" in the region.

Drone Zones

The drone industry is currently being utilized by both the government and private sectors in a number of ways, including on several upcoming programs. Here's a closer look at how drones are being put to use.

Infrastructure: Inspection of bridges, utility and gas lines, pipelines, canals, roadways and dams. A growing use will be creating 3D models of infrastructure to compare year-over-year inspections and to track issues.

Land surveying: Providing detailed mapping of land areas, detection of mineral deposits and other issues not easily seen.

Agriculture: Survey seeding work and allowing farmers to better check on crops without traveling over entire farms.

Public safety: Crowd control, fire control, monitoring of traffic patterns and surveying accident scenes

Emergency management: Surveying of floods, wildfires and other disasters; assistance in rescue and recovery efforts after a natural disaster; to help search teams more safely inspect disaster scenes.

Water management: Surveying of rivers and lakes for issues, including blue algae, and mapping of bodies of water.

Clean energy: Mapping, planning and ongoing maintenance inspections of solar farms and wind farms.

Health care: Potential use in shipping medicine to people outside SUNY Upstate Hospital and potential future use in transporting various tests from SUNY Upstate Hospital's Syracuse location to a test center about an hour away.

Supply chain: Moving cargo to and from airports; taking traffic off Central New York highways.

Ken Stewart, president of NUAIR, said a key part of the Center of Excellence program is growing the advanced air mobility industry, which relies on larger drones that could be used for cargo movement and eventually as air taxis, allowing for longer flight paths. The center is also looking at the safety aspects and demonstrating how these larger drone flights can be safely integrated among other aircraft. Stewart said that even the placement of Micron in the region will be a key part of the sector's growth. He noted that moving Micron shipments by air to the airport would reduce traffic congestion in the region and speed up the supply chain.

A move to airborne deliveries still requires federal regulation, Trevor Woods, executive director of the FAA's test site in North Dakota, told City & State. Woods said the industry is currently waiting on proposed FAA rules for larger drone usage and that he expects the approval process to take several years. Air taxis are another key growth area, he said, citing Manhattan as a likely spot once the technology is implemented.

NUAIR is also assisting state agencies with ways to incorporate drone technology into their work. “The more adoption by state agencies, the more they save the dollars they are given,” Stewart said. For example, drone use for inspection of the state’s 17,700 bridges would save an estimated \$1.35 billion annually, according to NUAIR, which has worked with the New York Power Authority, the state Canal Corp. and Upstate University Hospital in Syracuse. NUAIR is also working with Utah on drone issues, Saudi Arabia on advanced air mobility programs and international companies in the sector, many of which are interested in working in New York.

The Keenan Center for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Creativity at Le Moyne College has been offering a drone pilot education program that has been cited as a key part of the local ecosystem. Doug Hill, director of the Maker Institute at Le Moyne, said the program already allows students to obtain Part 107 training needed for drone piloting, with further programs being developed to allow for advanced training certification in drone piloting and training in drone engineering and technology. Part of this includes the required 20 hours of flight training, which Hill said has been used to assist public and private projects in the region.

Drone sensor company ResilienX, among the firms that stayed in Syracuse after being seeded in 2019 by the Genius NY program, has worked with private companies and had government contracts, including with NASA, the Air Force, Navy and FAA. Ryan Pleskach, the company’s co-founder and CEO, told City & State he credits Genius NY as being an important part of the tech firm’s growth. He said the biggest aspect was the mentorship, both during the cohort year and since, as being the best part of the program and its impact on his company.

He said that with the accelerator’s eighth cohort coming up, he can see the overall economic impact as the drone corridor continues to grow. “The progress and the seeds that were planted eight years ago,” he added, “are starting to bear fruit.”

<https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2024/04/drone-industry-booming-central-new-york/396085/>

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Schenectady National Guard member honored among best in country

WNYT, May 1, 2024::

A National Guard member from Schenectady has been named one of the top officers in the country.

Senior Master Sgt. Mayra Winnie has been recognized as the 2023 Force Support Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. That honor encompasses the entire Air National Guard. It looks at training, education and expertise.

Winnie currently serves as the personnel and development supervisor at National Guard Headquarters in Latham.

She also volunteers at the City Mission of Schenectady and has raised \$67,000 for the Northeastern Regional Food Bank.

She joined the National Guard in 2005 as an intelligence specialist.

She has received many medals, including the Air Force Achievement Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal and the New York Humane Service to New York State Medal.

Her deployments include time in Qatar.

<https://wnyt.com/capital-region-news/schenectady-national-guard-member-honored-among-best-in-country/>

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New York Army National Guard

The Army Sees Mortars as Safe. Troops Report Signs of Brain Injury.

New York Times, May 2, 2024:

THIS STORY IS INCLUDED FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES.

Soldiers exposed to thousands of low-level blasts from firing weapons like mortars say that they wind up with debilitating symptoms of traumatic brain injury — but no diagnosis.

After firing about 10,000 mortar rounds during four years of training, one soldier who joined the Army with near-perfect scores on the military aptitude test was struggling to read or do basic math.

Another soldier started having unexplained fits in which his internal sense of time would suddenly come unmoored, sending everything around him whirling in fast-forward.

A third, Sgt. Michael Devaul, drove home from a day of mortar training in such a daze that he pulled into a driveway, only to realize that he was not at his house but at his parents' house an hour away. He had no idea how he got there.

"Guys are getting destroyed," said Sergeant Devaul, who has fired mortars in the Missouri National Guard for more than 10 years. "Heads pounding, not being able to think straight or walk straight. You go to the medic. They say you are just dehydrated, drink water."

All three soldiers fired the 120-millimeter heavy mortar — a steel tube about the height of a man, used widely in training and combat, that unleashes enough explosive force to hurl a 31-pound bomb four miles. The heads of the soldiers who fire it are just inches from the blast.

The military says that those blasts are not powerful enough to cause brain injuries. But soldiers say that the Army is not seeing the evidence sitting in its own hospital waiting rooms.

In more than two dozen interviews, soldiers who served at different bases and in different eras said that over the course of firing thousands of mortar rounds in training, they developed symptoms that match those of traumatic brain injury, including headaches, insomnia, confusion, frayed memory, bad balance, racing hearts, paranoia, depression and random eruptions of rage or tears.

The military is confronting growing evidence that the blasts from firing weapons can cause brain injuries. So far, though, the Pentagon has identified a potential danger only in a few unusual circumstances, like firing powerful antitank weapons or an abnormally high number of artillery shells. The military still knows little about whether routine exposure to lower-strength blasts from more common weapons like mortars can cause similar injuries.

Answering that question definitively would take a large-scale study that follows hundreds of soldiers for years, and it is impossible to draw sweeping conclusions from a handful of cases. But the soldiers interviewed by The New York Times have experienced problems similar enough to suggest a disturbing pattern.

Most soldiers said they had fired at least 1,000 rounds a year in training, often in bursts of hundreds over a few days. When they were new at firing, they said, they felt no lasting effects. But with each subsequent training session, headaches, mental fogginess and nausea seemed to come on quicker and last longer. After years of firing, the soldiers experienced problems so severe that they interfered with daily life.

Nearly all of the soldiers interviewed for this article never saw combat, but they were nonetheless haunted by nightmares, anxiety, panic attacks and other symptoms usually attributed to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Nearly all sought medical help from the Army or the Department of Veterans Affairs and were screened for traumatic brain injury, but did not get a diagnosis. Instead, doctors treated individual symptoms, prescribing headache medicine, antidepressants and sleeping pills.

That is in part because of how traumatic brain injuries, known as T.B.I.s, are diagnosed. There is no imaging scan or blood test that can detect the swarms of microscopic tears that repeated blast exposure can cause in a living brain. The damage can be seen only postmortem.

So, doctors screening for T.B.I.s ask three questions: Did the patient experience an identifiable, physically traumatic event, like a roadside bomb blast or car crash? Did the patient get knocked unconscious, see stars or experience other altered state of consciousness at the time? And is the patient still experiencing symptoms?

The problem is that people who are repeatedly exposed to weapons blasts often cannot pinpoint a specific traumatic event or altered state of consciousness, according to Stuart W. Hoffman, who directs brain injury research for the V.A. With career mortar soldiers, he said, "if you're not feeling the effects at the time, but you're being repeatedly exposed to it, it would be difficult to diagnose that condition with today's current standards."

That means injuries that seem obvious to soldiers go unrecorded in official records and become invisible to commanders and policymakers at the top. As a result, weapons design, training protocols and other key aspects of military readiness may fail to account for the physical limits of human brain tissue.

An Army spokesman, Lt. Col. Rob Lodewick, said in a statement that for decades the Army has been studying how to make weapons safer to fire and is "committed to understanding how brain health is affected, and to implementing evidence-based risk mitigation and treatment."

Asked if the Army plans to phase out the use of the 120-millimeter mortar, a mobile weapon that nearly all infantry units use to rain down bombs on enemy positions, Colonel Lodewick said no.

Still, there are signs that the Army sees problems with the mortar. It is developing a cone for the muzzle to deflect blast pressure away from soldiers' heads. And in January, the Army issued an internal safety warning, drastically limiting the number of rounds that soldiers fire in training to no more than 33 rounds a day using the weakest charge, and no more than three rounds a day using the strongest.

That warning, though, makes no mention of brain injury; the stated purpose is to protect troops' hearing.

The military measures the force of blast waves in pounds of pressure per square inch, and the current safety guidelines say that anything below 4 PSI is safe for the brain. The blast from firing a 120-millimeter mortar officially measures at 2.5 PSI. But the guidelines do not take account of whether a soldier is exposed to a single blast or to a thousand.

There are roughly 9,000 mortar soldiers in the Army — and, in all service branches, there are thousands more troops who regularly use weapons that deliver a similar punch: artillery, rockets, tanks, heavy machine guns, even large-caliber sniper rifles.

Justin Andes, 34, launched about 10,000 mortar rounds in Army training at Fort Johnson, La., between 2018 and 2021.

He began to experience migraines, dizziness and confusion, to such a degree that his job of keeping accurate counts of weapons in his unit's armory became a struggle. Eventually he had an emotional breakdown with thoughts of suicide, and he left the Army in dismay when his enlistment ended.

"We had to keep a count of every round we fired, and get the mortar tubes inspected each year, because all those blasts can take a toll on the weapons system," he said in an interview. "But no one was doing that for us."

Mr. Andes joined the Army with a college degree and top scores on the military aptitude test. He had planned to get a graduate degree in political science, but after firing so many mortar rounds, he had trouble reading. Today, Mr. Andes, who now lives in Jefferson City, Mo., speaks with a slight slur, sometimes puts the milk in the kitchen cupboard instead of the refrigerator, and spends much of his time in his basement.

"His voice is different, he acts different, he is a different person from the man I married," his wife, Kristyn Andes, said. "I didn't start to connect the dots that this might be mortars until some of the other wives said they were having the same issues."

The first sergeant in charge of Mr. Andes' platoon, she said, was having trouble, too. He was forgetting words, struggling to remember his responsibilities and had a stammer in his speech and a tremor in his hand.

Another soldier in his platoon, James Davis, 33, started having near-daily panic attacks in uniform, as well as balance problems, migraines and sensitivity to light. He went to a specialty clinic for traumatic brain injury at Fort Johnson in 2022. "I was told that with time, the symptoms would disappear," said Mr. Davis, who now lives in Colorado Springs, in an interview. "I am still waiting for that to happen."

Mr. Andes, Mr. Davis and their first sergeant all left the Army without any official record that their brains may have been injured by mortar blasts. All three went to the

V.A. for help. All three were found to be substantially disabled by issues that can be caused by traumatic brain injury, like vertigo, headaches, anxiety and sleep apnea. But not one was diagnosed with a brain injury.

Former soldiers who fired mortars in the 1980s and 1990s say their experiences show that the problems are not new and may not improve with time.

“It’s hard for me to piece together, because my memory has gotten so bad, but things are definitely getting worse,” said Jordan Merkel, 55, who joined the Army in 1987 and fired an estimated 10,000 mortar rounds over four years.

In uniform, Mr. Merkel started experiencing strange fugue states, where he would be awake but barely responsive and would retain little memory afterward of what had happened.

After the Army, he tried college but spent most of the time struggling through remedial classes. He married and divorced three times and said that he remembers very little about those relationships.

For years he worked testing security software — a job with a predictable routine that allowed him to get by. But in 2016, he forgot how to do his work: Procedures he’d been following for years drew a blank.

He was soon laid off, got a similar job and was laid off again. He has recently noticed trouble reading an analog clock.

“I’m really concerned,” said Mr. Merkel, who now lives in Harrisburg, Pa. “This is not normal aging, this is something else.”

He went to the V.A. this spring seeking help. The medical staff asked whether he had ever hit his head or been knocked unconscious, but they seemed dismissive when he brought up mortars, he said.

“They weren’t the least bit interested in discussing anything related to blast concussion,” he said.

Todd Strader had a similar experience. He fired mortars in the 1980s and 1990s at a U.S. base in Germany, and he developed headaches so severe that he would collapse on the ground and vomit. He was hospitalized in the Army for unexplained intestinal problems — a common issue among people with traumatic brain injuries.

As a civilian, he struggled with fractured concentration, fatigue and anxiety.

“I had plans for myself after the Army,” said Mr. Strader, 54, who now lives in Apex, N.C. “I wanted to travel the world but just ended up working a string of dead-end jobs.”

He went to the V.A. in 2019 and was told that there was nothing in his record to suggest a military service-associated brain injury. Instead he was diagnosed with PTSD, even though he had never been in combat.

Frustrated that the V.A. would not recognize what seemed obvious to him, he started a Facebook group, hoping to find other mortar soldiers with the same symptoms. The group now has nearly 2,500 members.

The Pentagon has repeatedly assured Congress that the military is giving new attention to blast exposure, but ordinary soldiers say they have seen little change.

Sergeant Devaul, who drove home to the wrong house, is now trying to get the Army to recognize that years of firing mortars injured his brain. He hasn't had much luck.

At his kitchen table in Kansas City, Mo., on a recent morning, he described how for 18 years he fired mortars, and how his life slowly fell apart.

He started in the active-duty Army in 2006 and transferred to the National Guard in 2010. He deployed twice but never saw combat.

After years of firing, he started to have trouble thinking. He had a civilian job doing carpentry but struggled with the math and organizational skills and left in frustration. He worked as a security guard for several years, but he developed headaches and concentration problems, and had outbursts of rage.

Then he got a break from firing. For much of 2017 and 2018 he was in Qatar on a mission with no mortars and then in training away from the mortar range. He began feeling clearer and calmer. He studied to become an emergency medical technician and, in 2019, got a job with his local fire department.

But that summer he resumed firing mortars. He started struggling to remember where supplies were kept in his ambulance. Other firefighters told him that he seemed to spend much of his time staring at nothing. The department asked him to learn to drive a fire truck, but he doubted that he could pass the test.

In the fall of 2021 he was firing mortars in a training exercise and suddenly felt as though a seam had split in his head. He was dizzy and sick. For weeks afterward, he said, his skull was throbbing, and he was confused and angry.

"I felt worthless and stupid," he said. "I was so exhausted I could barely get off the couch. I didn't see it getting better."

His wife filed for divorce. He became suicidal and spent five days in a program for PTSD.

At his next National Guard training, it took only a few blasts to put him on the ground with the world spinning.

The Guard now lists him as temporarily disabled by what it calls “post-concussion syndrome.” He is not allowed to fire mortars or even rifles.

Since Sergeant Devaul can’t do his military job, the Guard has begun the process of discharging him. If it decides his injuries are service-related, he’ll be medically retired with lifetime benefits. If not, he’ll be forced out with next to nothing.

Sergeant Devaul met recently with his brigade’s surgeon to be evaluated for traumatic brain injury. He said the doctor seemed skeptical that firing mortars could cause his symptoms.

“I kept asking, ‘What else could have caused it?’ He didn’t have an answer,” he said. “I’ve got every single symptom of a traumatic brain injury. I just don’t have a diagnosis.”

A correction was made on May 2, 2024: An earlier version of this article included an outdated city of residence for Todd Strader. He now lives in Apex, N.C., not Hampton, Va.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/02/us/blast-mortar-brain-injury-military.html>

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New York Army Guard Soldiers Heading to North Africa

Nationalguard.mil and Army.mil, April 30, 2024::

LATHAM, N.Y. - Seven hundred New York Army National Guard Soldiers will take part in a multinational training exercise in Tunisia and Morocco in May.

Most of the New York National Guard Soldiers involved in the exercise are part of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, and will be training in Morocco in the second half of the month.

The regiment is headquartered in Utica and has elements in Geneseo, Morrisonville, Ithaca and Glenville.

The 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery, will deploy 120 Soldiers with a battery of 105 mm M114A1 howitzers, based at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in New Windsor, to Tunisia in early May.

The exercise, dubbed African Lion, will be the largest U.S. military training event conducted on the African continent. Over 8,100 military personnel from 27 countries and NATO will participate in training events in Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana and Senegal.

National Guard units from Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, North Dakota, Vermont and Virginia will also train alongside U.S. active duty forces, including the U.S. Army and Air Force Reserve, and a large cohort of allied and partner nations. Military doctors and dentists will also visit local villages to provide humanitarian assistance as part of the exercise in Morocco.

"Multinational exercises like African Lion allow us to work shoulder to shoulder with multiple international partners and be part of a unique multinational force," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Frank Engle, the commander of the 108th Infantry. "We relish the opportunity to demonstrate our proficiency on the continent."

Engle's battalion will participate in operations in Morocco with Soldiers from the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team headquarters based in Syracuse, the 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion from Buffalo, and the 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery, operating out of Camp Smith, near Peekskill.

During the training, the 108th Infantry will fire tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided missiles, known as TOWs, and Javelin anti-tank missiles.

African Lion 2024 is the 20th anniversary of a training exercise that initially involved just the U.S. Marine Corps and the Moroccan military.

The exercise, coordinated by U.S. Africa Command, enhances regional cooperation and security in North and West Africa.

The New York National Guard Soldiers will be taking part in live-fire exercises as part of drills involving naval gunfire and even B-52 bombing missions in Morocco.

"This will be easily the biggest thing I've ever seen," Engle said.

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/3760160/new-york-army-guard-soldiers-heading-to-north-africa/>

https://www.army.mil/article/275806/new_york_army_guard_soldiers_heading_to_north_africa

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Utica-based National Guard unit heading to North Africa for training exercises

Rome Sentinel, April 30, 2024 ::

UTICA — Nearly 700 New York Army National Guard soldiers will take part in a multi-national training exercise in Tunisia and Morocco in May, with the bulk of the soldiers coming from the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, which is headquartered in Utica and has elements in Geneseo, Morrisonville, Ithaca, and Glenville.

The 108th Infantry will fire tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided missiles, known as TOWs, and javelin anti-tank missiles during their training in Morocco in mid-to-late May.

In addition, soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery, will deploy 120 soldiers with a battery of 105 millimeter M114A1 howitzers, based at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in New Windsor, to Tunisia in early May.

The exercise, dubbed African Lion, will be the largest U.S. military training event conducted on the African continent. More than 8,100 military personnel from 27 countries and NATO will participate in training events in Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana, and Senegal.

“Multinational exercises like African Lion allow us to work shoulder to shoulder with multiple international partners and be part of a unique multinational force,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Frank Engle, the commander of the 108th Infantry. “We relish the opportunity to demonstrate our proficiency on the continent,” he said.

The exercise, coordinated by U.S. Africa Command, is designed to enhance regional cooperation and security in North and West Africa. It is an opportunity to conduct realistic, dynamic, and collaborative training to strengthen interoperability and build readiness, according to the command website.

The New York National Guard soldiers will take part in live fire exercises as part of drills involving naval gunfire and even B-52 bombing missions in Morocco. “This will be easily the biggest thing I’ve ever seen,” Engle said.

National Guard units from Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, North Dakota, Vermont and Virginia will also take part in the training, alongside U.S. active duty forces, including the U.S. Army and Air Force Reserve and a large cohort of allied and partner nations.

Humanitarian assistance visits by military doctors and dentists in local villages will also be part of the exercise in Morocco.

https://www.romesentinel.com/news/ny-army-national-guard-utica-108th-infantry-regiment/article_b73f60aa-0620-11ef-83ca-d7da9f807d0c.html

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NY Army National Guard soldiers heading to North Africa for training

Livingston County News, April 29, 2024::

LATHAM - Seven hundred New York Army National Guard soldiers will take part a multi-national training exercise in Tunisia and Morocco in May.

The bulk of the New York National Guard Soldiers involved in the exercise are part of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, which has elements in Geneseo, and will be training in Morocco in the second half of the month.

The regiment is headquartered in Utica and has elements in Geneseo, Morrisonville, Ithaca, and Glenville.

The 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery, will deploy 120 Soldiers with a battery of 105 millimeter M114A1 howitzers, based at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in New Windsor, to Tunisia in early May.

The exercise, dubbed African Lion, will be the largest U.S. military training event conducted on the African continent. More than 8,100 military personnel from 27 counties, and NATO will participate in training events in Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana, and Senegal.

"Multinational exercises like African Lion allow us to work shoulder to shoulder with multiple international partners and be part of a unique multinational force," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Frank Engle, the commander of the 108th Infantry.

"We relish the opportunity to demonstrate our proficiency on the continent," he said.

Engle's battalion will take part in operations in Morocco, along with soldiers from the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team headquarters based in Syracuse, the 152nd Brigade Engineer Battalion from Buffalo, and the 1st Battalion, 258th Field Artillery. The 258th Field Artillery is headquartered in Jamaica, Queens, but is currently operating out of Camp Smith, near Peekskill, while the armory is being rebuilt.

The 108th Infantry will fire tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided missiles, known as TOWs, and Javelin anti-tank missiles during the training.

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"This will be easily the biggest thing I've ever seen," Engle said.

National Guard units from Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, North Dakota, Vermont and Virginia will also take part in the training, alongside U.S. active duty forces, including the U.S. Army and Air Force Reserve and a large cohort of allied and partner nations.

Humanitarian assistance visits by military doctors and dentists in local villages will also be part of the exercise in Morocco.

https://www.thelcn.com/news/ny-army-national-guard-soldiers-heading-to-north-africa-for-training/article_88617a34-0620-11ef-897f-3fd98b52c7a9.html

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700 New York Army National Guard soldiers heading to North Africa for exercise in May

Niagara Frontier Publications, April 29, 2024::

Seven hundred New York Army National Guard soldiers will take part a multinational training exercise in Tunisia and Morocco in May.

The bulk of the New York National Guard soldiers involved in the exercise are part of the 2nd Battalion, 108th Infantry Regiment, and will be training in Morocco in the second half of the month.

The regiment is headquartered in Utica and has elements in Geneseo, Morrisonville, Ithaca and Glensville.

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Humanitarian assistance visits by military doctors and dentists in local villages will also be part of the exercise in Morocco.

<https://www.wnypapers.com/news/article/current/2024/04/29/159693/700-new-york-army-national-guard-soldiers-heading-to-north-africa-for-exercise-in-may>

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New York National Guard

Duty Calls: Airman goes a long way to commemorate Bataan March

Times Union, April 28, 2024::

A New York Air National Guard chief master sergeant had good reason again to join thousands of other marathoners at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, according to Sr. Airman Rebekah Wilson, a spokeswoman for the 105th Airlift Wing.

Chief Master Sgt. Patricia Pullar of Newburgh, a senior enlisted leader in the 105th Airlift Wing at Stewart Air National Guard Base, Newburgh, completed a 26.2-mile Bataan Death March Marathon for the fourth time.

Pullar joined more than 5,000 other marathoners in the marathon, hosted by the New Mexico National Guard for the past 34 years.

The harriers completed the grueling course that included steep changes in elevations and sandy terrain to commemorate the Bataan Death March in the Philippines in 1942, according to Wilson. More than 70,000 American and Filipino soldiers, who surrendered to Japanese forces, were forced to walk 65 miles between April 9 and 15, 1942 to a prison camp with little food and water and were being abused by Japanese soldiers. More than 10,000 soldiers, mostly Filipinos, died during the long trek. Civilians who tried to aid the captured men were also killed by the Japanese.

Pullar had also completed the marathon in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

The 32-year veteran of military service said she decided to sign up for this year's event after setting a goal to push herself physically and cultivate her fitness as well as to commemorate those who died during the World War II march. What started as a routine workout schedule evolved into rigorous strength and cardio training for a marathon she hadn't done in 16 years.

"It's very emotional," Pullar recalled. "Especially when you cross the finish line, because you're only doing a small portion of what the actual Bataan Death Marchers did. It makes you think about the service they were providing to their country and the whole meaning of wearing the uniform."

On the day of the race, she said, her priorities included ensuring she had enough sustenance to replenish her energy and enough protection around her feet. As a military entrant, Pullar had to wear her full Air Force uniform through the entire march — including combat boots, she said. She carried her food and drinks in a Camelback decorated with patches from the 105th Airlift Wing.

The patches reminded her of her fellow 105th airmen who motivate her as a senior enlisted leader. "I had the Wing patch and my two squadron patches, the Operations

Support Squadron and the 137th Airlift Squadron,” Pullar said. “I wanted to show some unit pride and gratitude for our folks working hard here at home, and for those serving abroad who voluntarily stepped away from their lives and families for their nation.” she added.

The course began at a 4,000-foot elevation before the racers had to climb to an approximate 5,500-foot elevation by the halfway mark. They then descended the small mountain known as Mineral Hill to be greeted by the “Sand Pit”, a deep, sandy path about a mile long, she said.

“The Sand Pit was pretty rough and it slowed us down a lot,” she added.

Troops board USS Slater

Twenty-one soldiers and an airmen assigned to the New York National Guard’s 2nd Civil Support Team tested their ability to detect weapons of mass destruction aboard the World War II destroyer escort USS Slater docked on the Hudson River in downtown Albany.

Members of the New York National Guard’s two Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams are trained to identify and mitigate chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive substances. During the exercise, three teams of two to three personnel used detection equipment to find and mark radioactive material. Other teams then removed the radioactive material and decontaminated the area.

“Each year, the CST finds different training sites to challenge its survey teams, which specialize in detection, identification and sample collections in contaminated areas,” said New York Army National Guard Lt. Col. John Giroux, the commander of the 2nd CST.

The teams search and identify radiation sources in unfamiliar environments within confined spaces.

“This year’s training consisted of classroom instructions on topics like basic radiation and then culminated with training that focused on radiological concepts before the survey teams tried to search and identify radiation sources,” Giroux said.

The hands-on training took place aboard the USS Slater, a 306-foot destroyer escort that escorted convoys across the Atlantic during World War II. The ship has been a museum ship docked in the Hudson River in Albany since 1997.

“This unique training site allowed us to test the capabilities and problem-solving skills of our team members who are training at the operational and communication level,” Giroux said.

“We were privileged to receive world-class instruction and coaching from the Department of Energy Radiation Assistance Program and the State Police and are especially grateful to the USS Slater staff for their partnership and support, without whom our success today could not have been possible,” Giroux said.

“This training was a great opportunity for our team to learn from the subject matter experts while also exercising our capabilities and strengthening our relationships with our partner agencies,” said Capt. Ryan Gonch, the operations officer for the 2nd CST.

The 2nd CST, headquartered at Stratton Air National Guard Base in Scotia, is responsible for central, upstate and western New York. The 24th CST, based at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, is responsible for missions in New York City, Long Island and the lower Hudson Valley.

The teams have equipment that local civilian agencies lack, such as a mobile lab that enables members to analyze and identify chemicals and substances on location, Gonch said.

The 2nd CST team tracked down and discovered the radioactive material hidden on the destroyer. Hazardous material teams from the FBI and New York State Police also participated in the exercise, which was facilitated by scientists from the Department of Energy’s Brookhaven National Laboratory.

Tim Rizzuto, the executive director of the Slater, said he was happy the historic ship could accommodate the training.

Hometown Heroes Day

A Hometown Heroes and Family Fun Community Day will be held by Patriot Hills from 1 to 5:30 p.m. Sunday, May 5 at the Rotterdam Elks Lodge, 1152 Curry Road, Rotterdam.

The event celebrates and gives thanks to our military personnel, veterans and first responders, according to Jeanine Mannarino, Patriot Hills chief executive officer. Indoor and outdoor family games, activities and entertainment are planned. Rotterdam Police will provide free child safety kits.

Patriot Hills, a Cohoes-based charity, helps connect service members and veterans with services they need. For information, contact Jeannine Mannarino at PHNYJeannie@gamai.com.

News of your troops and units can be sent to Times Union, Duty Calls, Terry Brown, Box 15000, Albany, NY 12212 or brownt@timesunion.com

<https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/airman-goes-long-way-commemorate-bataan-march-19425118.php>

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Space Force

Governors oppose National Guard move to Space Force

Iowa Capitol Dispatch, April 29, 2024 ::

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed on to a letter Monday alongside 47 other state governors, as well as five territories and commonwealths, opposing the Biden administration's move to incorporate Air National Guard service members into the Space Force.

The letter from the National Governors' Association, addressed to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, is written in opposition to a legislative proposal submitted by the Department of Defense to the Senate Armed Services Committee that would transfer some Air National Guard personnel and equipment currently being used on space missions to the Space Force.

The Defense Department proposal would require Congress to override existing law requiring that governors approve changes to National Guard units, through Title 10 and 32 of the U.S. Code, that outlines gubernatorial authority over their states' National Guard.

The bipartisan group of governors signing the letter said the proposed measure would hurt governors' abilities to use the National Guard in response to crises. Governors must retain full authority over these units "to protect operational readiness and America's communities," the letter states.

"Legislation that sidesteps, eliminates or otherwise reduces Governors' authority within their states and territories undermines longstanding partnerships, precedence, military readiness and operational efficacy," the letter states. "This action also negatively affects the important relationships between Governors and DOD at a time when we need to have full trust and confidence between the two to meet the growing threats posed by the era of strategic competition as well as natural disasters."

Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall told federal lawmakers earlier in April that the proposal would shift roughly 700 National Guard members to Space Force as part of a one-time transfer. There are currently 14 units, with about 1,000 personnel, working on space-related missions in seven states — Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida,

Hawaii, New York and Ohio — that could be impacted by the move, according to the National Guard Association of the United States.

The National Guard advocacy group also released a statement opposing the draft legislation. Kendall told reporters in April that he doesn't "see a reason why a state needs a Space Force militia." But Retired Maj. Gen. Frank M. McGinn, the organization's president, said keeping space missions within the National Guard keeps the personnel current serving on space missions in work, as many are not able to move or take on full-time responsibilities. It allows states to retain the same defense and military capabilities as other parts of the country, he said — comparing the issue to states having artillery and cyber units in the National Guard, separate from the U.S. military.

"Here is what Secretary Kendall is asking to do: Skirt federal law to transfer nearly empty units to the Space Force, thereby reducing the nation's military space capabilities at a time when our nation is seeing growing competition in space," McGinn said. "I don't see why he wants to take this action. And a growing number in Congress wonder the same."

Only two state governors, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, did not sign on to the letter. Both states have a vested interest in Space Force operations and development, with Patrick Space Force Base in Brevard County, Florida being one of the five current bases of the military branch. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) also has operations in both states.

<https://iowacapitaldispatch.com/briefs/governors-oppose-national-guard-move-to-space-force/>

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Joe Biden Faces Rebellion From Governors Over National Guard Move

Newsweek, April 30, 2024 ::

Nearly every U.S. governor, including those in Democratic states, has opposed the Biden administration's move to incorporate Air National Guard service members into the Space Force.

In a letter to the Department of Defense on Monday, 53 governors in states and U.S. territories signed a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin voicing their "strong opposition" to the plan.

The letter, signed by several allies of President Joe Biden, argues that the plan to shift space units from the Air National Guard to the Space Force "undermines over 100 years of precedent" as well as national security and military readiness.

The letter arrived after the Defense Department sent a legislative proposal to Congress in March to bypass existing laws requiring governors' consent to make changes to the National Guard and move 14 units to the Space Force.

The letter states, "Governors must maintain full authority as Commanders in Chief of these assets to effectively protect operational readiness and America's communities."

"Legislation that sidesteps, eliminates or otherwise reduces Governors' authority within their states and territories undermines long-standing partnerships, precedence, military readiness and operational efficacy.

"This action also negatively affects the important relationships between Governors and DOD at a time when we need to have full trust and confidence between the two to meet the growing threats posed by the era of strategic competition as well as natural disasters."

The letter, signed by Democrats including California Governor Gavin Newsom, New York Governor Kathy Hochul and Colorado Governor Jared Polis, adds that such a move regarding moving the National Guard will "violate the trust of the brave women and men who have volunteered to serve our states and our nation."

The Department of Defense declined to comment when contacted by Newsweek.

Newsweek also reached out to the White House for comment via email.

The only two U.S. governors who did not sign the letter were Florida's Ron DeSantis and Texas' Greg Abbott, both Republicans.

The National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS) has previously criticized the proposals to try and move units from the Air National Guard into the Space Force and called on the creation of a separate Space National Guard instead.

The NGAUS said that the 14 units that could be moved to the Space Force, which consist of 1,000 Guardsmen across Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, New York and Ohio, provide 30 percent of the U.S. military's space operations squadrons and 60 percent of its electromagnetic warfare capability.

Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall previously suggested earlier this month that any disruption regarding the proposals is "negligible."

"We've had much, much more political attention over this issue than it deserves, in my mind," Kendall told reporters at Space Symposium, Defense One reported.

"We're talking about a few hundred people. The numbers for any state are less than, I think, 2 percent at most of their Guard people, and they're only a handful of states that are affected."

Kendall also rejected the idea that separate states should have their own military space forces.

"The governors may have a different view, but I don't see a reason why a state needs a Space Force militia," Kendall said.

<https://www.newsweek.com/governors-letter-biden-space-force-air-national-guard-1895514>

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Subway Mission

Security theater instead of safety: New York's militarized subway checkpoints are a political scam

The Hill, April 26, 2024:::

During his colorful tenure as mayor of New York City, Ed Koch often rode the subway and asked his fellow straphangers, "How'm I doin'?" If only Gov. Kathy Hochul would do the same. It wouldn't take more than one or two brief trips to learn that her new militarized checkpoint scheme for the subway is not only burdensome and unpopular but patently unconstitutional.

Last month, Hochul implemented her plan to address the increasing public perception that crime on New York's subways has gotten out of hand. But the governor didn't seek to arrest and lock up the criminals. No, that would make too much sense. Rather, she deployed the National Guard to the busiest, but not necessarily most dangerous, subway stations.

Under the watchful gaze of the military, the police search innocent passengers' bags as a condition of entry to the subway. Passengers must open their bags for the probing fingers and eyeballs of police and soldiers alike. Those who refuse the searches are denied access to the most essential public transportation system in New York.

As if that weren't bad enough, Hochul concedes that her strategy won't catch criminals. Catching criminals isn't even the point. Instead, she told MSNBC's "Morning Joe" that she deployed the military in the subways while police search innocent commuters so that people "feel safe."

To hear her tell it, the subways are already safe, but people need to see the military to feel safe. That's why National Guard troops are deployed to the highest-trafficked spots in town instead of areas where recent shootings have occurred.

This is nothing more than "security theater." It looks like people are being protected — but they're not. Meanwhile, in just the few weeks since the unconstitutional checkpoints were established, violent crimes have been caught on video all over the city's subways.

Gov. Hochul is violating countless New Yorker's constitutional rights every day, all for the illusion of safety.

The Fourth Amendment protects the fundamental right against unreasonable searches of persons and their property. For this reason, all searches that take place without a warrant are unconstitutional. For that reason alone, Hochul starts behind the eight ball with her scheme.

To be sure, the governor can try to justify the illegal checkpoints by relying on 20-year-old case law decided in the wake of the 9/11 attacks that approved police searches on the subway for terrorists and their bombs. But, as Hochul has made clear, preventing terrorist attacks is not the point. It's about appearances.

The courts have said, over and over, that the fact that criminals commit crimes does not give the state authority to ignore the Constitution in trying to catch them. Instead, warrantless and suspicionless searches for evidence of everyday crime is unequivocally unconstitutional. If security doesn't justify ignoring the Fourth Amendment, then security theatre surely doesn't.

But if Gov. Hochul had her way, and safety alone were a sufficient basis for allowing suspicionless checkpoints, there would be no constitutional constraint on placing a military at the entrance to every city neighborhood in the name of safety — or perhaps even only certain neighborhoods, those with residents who don't like the incumbent governor, police chief, or city council, for example. This might fly in other parts of the world, but America is not a police state.

Ben Franklin famously said "those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." Here, Hochul is willing to give away essential liberty not even for safety but rather for the mere appearance of safety. That is a strange and unconstitutional bargain to strike.

Mayor Koch used to call himself "a liberal with sanity." Gov. Hochul, with all due respect, you're no Ed Koch. If you want subway riders to feel safe, start by protecting their constitutional rights and focus on catching actual criminals.

Mark Miller and Daniel Woislaw are attorneys at Pacific Legal Foundation, a public interest law firm that defends Americans' liberty against government overreach and abuse.

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UH-72 Crash

Criminal Investigation Opened In Helicopter Crash Killing NY National Guard Members: Report

WhitePlains Daily Voice, April 27, 2024 ::

Officials have launched a criminal investigation into a National Guard helicopter crash near the southern border that killed two members from New York and a third victim, ABC News reports.

The incident – which saw a UH-72 Lakota helicopter go down near Rio Grande City, Texas, on Friday, March 8 – is now the focus of an investigation by the Starr County Sheriff's Office into whether there was any criminal wrongdoing, officials told the outlet.

That investigation is separate from a parallel probe being conducted by the Department of Defense. So far, authorities have not publicly said what caused the crash.

Killed in the incident were 28-year-old Casey Frankoski, a Rensselaer County native from the city of Rensselaer and graduate of Columbia High School, and 30-year-old John Grassia, a New York State Police trooper and Schenectady County native from Rotterdam.

According to the Joint Task Force North, a US Border Patrol agent also died in the crash. Jacob Pratt, of Rensselaer, was the sole survivor and remains hospitalized in critical condition.

Frankoski, a former volunteer firefighter, enlisted in the Army National Guard in October 2016 and was appointed Chief Warrant Officer in 2019, her obituary said. She trained to become a Black Hawk helicopter pilot and spent nearly a year deployed to Kuwait as a mission planner.

Among the many honors she received were the Army Achievement Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, and the Armed Forces Service Medal.

“Casey was dedicated to serving the United States,” reads her memorial.

Writing in his obituary, Grassia’s family said they take solace in knowing that he died “doing what he loved most: flying and protecting those he loved.”

A native of Niskayuna, Grassia enlisted in the Army National Guard at the age of 18 before he graduated from Schalmont High School in 2012. After training, he served in Kuwait as a helicopter repairer.

He earned his bachelor of science degree in informatics and cyber security from the University at Albany, later working as a cybersecurity analyst for the New York State Department of Homeland Security.

In 2022, relatives said Grassia “proudly” became a New York State Police trooper.

“J’s journey in this world was marked by an unwavering commitment to service and adventure,” reads his memorial. “He was a true American hero.”

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