

What's missing from the 77-minute Uvalde video?

BY JOHN M. CRISP
Tribune News Service

It's not easy to make sense of the 77-minute video shot from an overhead camera near the classrooms where 19 children and two teachers were murdered in Uvalde, Texas, on May 24.

The video – released last week by the Austin American-Statesman – has an audio track that is garbled to near-unintelligibility. The gunshots – more than a hundred – are audible, but the screams of the terrified children have been, appropriately, erased. The camera captures an important slice of the events of May 24, but only a slice.

In other words, a significant amount of the context is not represented in the video. But there's enough to deeply disturb most viewers.

An initial attempt to subdue the shooter fails. Then the video shows more than an hour of powerful-looking, well-armed men milling around in the hall, apparently uncertain what to do.

Sometimes they barricade behind ballistic shields and train four or five weapons down a long, empty hallway toward the classrooms for minutes at a time. Other times they stroll up and down the same hallway, seemingly unconcerned.

Sometimes the officers – representing at least five

law enforcement agencies – appear to be examining the building's floor plan. Sometimes they text or talk on their phones. They gesture, wave, signal each other, appearing to plan and strategize, but then for long minutes nothing happens.

At one point, an armed, helmeted member of the sheriff's department strolls casually through an area previously barricaded by four or five men to use the wall-mounted hand sanitizer dispenser.

In short, it's hard to tell what – if anything – is happening. The word that kept occurring to me as I watched was “confusion.”

Experts better trained to evaluate situations such as this one were unsparing in

their criticism. Former Austin, Houston and Miami police chief Art Acevedo called the episode “the most incompetent response that I've ever seen. It's not defensible.”

Acevedo is correct: The inaction of these officers is impossible to defend. But at the risk of appearing to defend them, I offer two elements of context that aren't immediately apparent in the video:

Despite the bluster and bravado from some quarters, none of us knows how we would behave in these circumstances. After the Parkland, Florida, school shooting that killed 17, former President Donald Trump said that he would have run into the building “even if I didn't

have a weapon.”

Sure. But people of a more thoughtful turn of mind must concede that while they think they know what they would do, they can't know for sure until they are in the situation.

Of course, this isn't a defense of these officers. Bad leadership and a failure of courage appear to have immobilized them. If they don't have the initiative and courage to act, they are in the wrong profession.

The second element not immediately apparent in the video isn't a defense of them either. But it illuminates the question of responsibility for the failures in Uvalde.

The Uvalde shooter grew up in a culture awash in guns. It's not just the 400 million weapons in the hands of private citizens. Gunplay is an essential element of our entertainment, in movies, television and video games. Kids can't be blamed for growing up thinking that

weapons are part of what it means to be an American.

The Uvalde shooter evidently had mental problems, but no one paid much attention. Nevertheless, as soon as he turned 18, we gave him legal access to high-powered, high-capacity weapons of war.

A few things the officers milling around confusedly in the hallway could be sure of: The kid was in a defensive position. He was probably ready to die. He very likely had a magazine in his semi-automatic weapon that holds at least 30 rounds.

If you judge these officers harshly, well, they deserve it. But don't forget that we're asking them to do something that you and I might not have the courage to do. And the most important thing that would make these officers' jobs a little safer – limiting access to high-powered, high-capacity, semi-automatic weapons – we absolutely refuse to do.

SC justice system is working in Murdaugh case

BY BEVERLY A. CARROLL

The Murdaugh case is hardly an “indictment on our state's judicial system” (as stated in a July 14 column in The State, Island Packet and Beaufort Gazette).

In fact, upon revelation of his misdeeds, Mr. Murdaugh was immediately suspended and now has been disbarred from the practice of law by the South Carolina Supreme Court. The Court's order regarding this matter is publicly available at www.sccourts.org. Mr. Murdaugh is currently in jail facing numerous criminal charges and civil lawsuits, demonstrating the justice process at work. It is clear that the case is not “closed” on Mr. Murdaugh and others who participated in these alleged heinous acts.

We commend many who have worked towards justice, including law enforcement, attorneys on behalf of the wronged parties, journalists, the Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) and the South Carolina Supreme Court, all of which worked incredibly hard to investigate and identify all those involved. Claims that there are gaping holes in “public accountability” are not supported by the facts.

The practice of law is a highly regulated profession; it provides an avenue for anyone to complain about any attorney or judge followed by a comprehensive, confidential investigation that is designed to ensure that those who are making accusations and those accused are provided due process. An in-depth investigation does take time, but without that level of scrutiny anyone could level a complaint that could unjustly ruin a career or perhaps even manipulate a case with removal of a judge that one deems as not the “right one.” Each year, ODC publishes a report of complaints and actions taken involving judges and lawyers.

Unfortunately, there have been unscrupulous professionals in all walks of life who seek to take advantage of those they are supposed to serve. The practice of law is not immune. However, it is unfair to impute the conduct of an unethical professional to his or her entire profession. It is simply not accurate to state that the acts of Mr. Murdaugh somehow benefit judges or lawyer-legislators or are covered up by other attorneys. His actions and those that violate the oath to which each attorney swears, make us more determined to identify and punish those who use their license to do harm, take advantage and violate the trust placed in them.

There are approximately 14,000 active attorneys practicing in our state, and the vast majority go above and beyond to serve their clients and communities on a daily basis with the utmost dedication and integrity. They are the general rule in South Carolina, not the exception as headlines of the past year would have us believe. We write on behalf of Bar members who are proud to be South Carolina lawyers.

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How much time passed before taking action to stop a deadly attack?



77 MINUTES



187 MINUTES

CLAY BENNETT Chattanooga Times Free Press

Could Putin's actions be chance for the US to change its ways?

BY GRIFFIN THOMPSON
Chicago Tribune

To view the Russian leader as a gift may seem perverse. Yet, history teaches that growth, understanding and, dare I say, enlightenment typically depend on trauma, crisis and catastrophe. Putin has given us a healthy dose of all three and therein an opportunity to flourish. The Russian invasion of Ukraine follows a string of such “teachable moments” including the financial meltdown of 2009, the social upheavals of the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, COVID-19, and of course, global climate change.

Each of these “events” should be seen as signals that something is dreadfully wrong and thus occasions to wake up and examine hardened habits of thought and action. Sadly, the gift that Putin is offering is being treated much like the other above-mentioned gifts in our refusal to awaken from our slumbering ways.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has rattled political leaders and the foreign policy establishment. Given

the devastating nature and seismic implications of Putin's actions, one would have expected greater imagination from our politicians and pundits. While the Biden administration receives credit for the coalition it has mustered, its hackneyed framing of “autocracy versus democracy” tarnishes the luster. Biden is reflecting the foreign policy establishment's adherence to the simplistic good versus bad, friend versus foe dualistic mentality that cleaves originality from any solution. Suggestions that the U.S. may have provided a model for Putin's aggression through our past military forays are treated with ridicule and the charge of heresy.

But perhaps heresy is exactly what we now need to jolt ourselves out of the stale patterns of thought that have delivered diplomatic debacles and political stalemates across the globe. Putin's invasion should be the spur to rethink our grand strategies (to make them truly grand).

Our collective failure of imagination is on full display everywhere from our atavistic adversarial treatment of China to the

recent Summit of Americas where discordant views were expelled in hopes that isolation would silence blasphemy. However, history reveals that shunning foes won't vanquish their views, and rebuffing apostates fosters only more apostasy.

Pundits and politicians remain stuck in the anachronistic mindset of Newtonian physics. If geopolitical theater were only that simple. A pivot from a mechanistic, billiard-ball metaphor of geopolitics to a quantum perspective on competition and cooperation, in which foes can be friends and adversaries can act as allies, offers a freshness that today's circumstances demand. Replacing the mechanistic “either/or” democracy versus autocracy framing with the quantum “both/and” expands the range of possibilities significantly.

However, the orthodoxy of our foreign policy swivels narrowly between liberal internationalism's multilateral approaches and the realist's realpolitik devoted to bilateralism based on military might rationalized by divinely ordained U.S. global leadership. The world is not responding.

For all our talk about “innovation,” we do very little of it, at least when it comes to our policy strategems or our epistemological models. We remain mired in convention tragically oblivious to the turbulence enveloping us.

The first step is to realize that new solutions will only follow new modes of thinking. Einstein famously said, “We cannot solve our problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” Yet, we persist in trying. What passes as “strategic thinking” today suffers from a deficiency of curiosity and an excess of hubris. A new mode of thinking hinges on creating ways of reconciling our prejudices and presumptions with the prejudices and presumptions of others, moving beyond the either/or straitjacket of today's thinking.

What is true for foreign policy is true for domestic policy and the tempestuous state of our civic discourse. True leadership, authentic exceptionalism, seeks reconciliation while accepting that differences will endure, conflict is endemic and long-lasting consensus possibly chimerical.

Let us not squander Putin's gift but rather accept the paradoxical nature of the times and seize this opportunity to think and act anew.